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The Last Faun

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE—THE STRANGE ROMANCE OF BARRY LANDRIDGE, TO WHOM NATURE CALLED WITH A POWER THAT WAS MORE THAN HUMAN

By Hubbard Hutchinson

FTER so much journeying—halfway around the world, and all the way across the continent—Lon Wickwire's first night at home proved not to be a stimulating success. It was half past nine in late November. The wind's peculiar humming around the high-perched house added its note of active complaint. In contrast with the high curiosity and youthful eagerness of Oxford, the mental atmosphere that he found here made Lon vaguely disappointed and more than vaguely restless.

Preliminary gusts of affection, of photographs shown and questions asked, had filled the time since his arrival at six. His mother had perched on his bed, in pretended horror at the revelations of his bags. She had picked up one of the books that emerged from between two dress shirts, and hastily turned its pages.

"What's this, dear?"

Lon's voice issued suavely from the closet:

"That, darling, is the effort of a learned gentleman to prove, by the epistemological concept and the categorical imperative, that if you will a thing long enough and strongly enough, even if you are unconscious of volition, the thing will happen. I quite believe it."

His mother rose on that, and kissed him fondly in passing:

"Why don't you call up some of the boys and ask them up? Hélène Suares is out of town to-night, but she's coming back to-morrow."

So from nine to half past nine he had diligently stood at the telephone and called his old friends, only to find that they were engaged for the evening. Of course, he should not have expected otherwise; yet he left the telephone almost angrily, and wandered around the room, vaguely resentful.

His mind presented him with pictures of college vacations, and, quite suddenly, he remembered Barry Landridge. He recalled a certain swimming party, when Barry came down to the springboard among the rocks, "laughing with his whole body," as Lon suddenly thought, moving with the fluid ease of the waves below, not troubling to follow the path, but swinging down from an overhanging branch that dropped him on the springboard. His perfect bronze body was a momentary, amazing pattern against the black junipers, and then a curved cadence as he soared out and slipped into the sea.

Lon picked up hat, gloves, and overcoat to go out. He wanted to talk to some one of the things he liked to talk about. He drove up to Carney's, where, academic duties being over, every one worth while in the college world was sure to appear some time between seven and one. With the rather pathetic hope of finding old grads, he went in and ordered food, searching the room for a familiar head or figure.

He ate his lonely way through a combination sandwich, and was wishing desperately that he were back in Oxford, when a hand tumbled on his shoulder, and he turned to see Archie Edwards, full of quite evident joy at seeing him.

"I didn't know you had come home," said Archie, after preliminary greetings and the ordering of food—which, Lon noted, he did with customary carelessness. "I've read some of your things in the *Argonaut*. I didn't know you'd gone so deep in psychology as the last thing showed."

"Kesterleigh," returned Lon, "is the big man over there now. I got as much as I could from him. We frisked all over the subconscious. Used to hypnotize people in class."

"You did, you mean, or Kesterleigh?"

"Oh, he did, mostly; but some of us could, too. It's not in the least difficult, if your subject is either willing or unconscious that you're trying to establish it."

"Kesterleigh's rather on the Coué side, isn't he?"

"H-m!" Lon pondered for a moment. "Yes—but in a different sense. He stresses the will as an unconscious agent, whereas Coué, I believe, excludes it from the subconscious field altogether."

"I've subscribed to the *Argonaut* for several years now." Archie shifted back to his subject with a subtle and almost in-

discernible note of pride. "I expect you'll be a writer from now on."

Lon drummed impatient fingers.

"I may be able to write—when I'm sixty—if I don't get switched off on psychology. Do you know what I'd rather do than anything else? I should like to control people—not as a financier does, or a general, or an orator, but to control people mentally. It would only be certain ones—people whom one liked, or in whom one felt potentialities that needed stirring, such as latent artistic ability; or, in other cases, those who needed to have some attribute expunged. Think of the delight of being able to mold them!"

He saw his friend's astonished gaze withdraw suddenly, to follow some one behind him. The kindling interest faded from Archie's eyes, and a swift shadow of anxiety clouded them. He touched Lon on the arm.

"There's Barry Landridge!" Archie almost whispered it. "He's just come in with Phil Van Dusen."

Lon's glance caught the newcomer in a corner at the far end of the room. Barry Landridge was sliding out of his overcoat with the easy flowing of one movement into another that marked him.

Lon noted a general turning of heads in that direction. His sensitiveness to externals had barely had time to record a certain furtive wonder, an uneasy surmise, on people's faces, when Archie's tone of voice, rather than his words, drew Lon's attention round to him.

"I think they made a mistake to let him come back so soon."

Lon caught a portent of extreme unpleasantness.

"What do you mean?" he asked. "That sounds as if Barry was an escaped convict."

Archie stared solemnly.

"Why, don't you know?"

Lon flapped an impatient hand.

"Know what? Lord, Archie, I've been away nearly four years. What are you getting at?"

Archie let out a long breath.

"That's right—I'd forgotten for a minute. Why, Lon"—he leaned across the table and dropped his voice—"Barry's been more or less out of his mind for more than a year. He's had the best care in the world, and hasn't been shut up—at least, no more than was necessary to study him."

"Good God, Archie—as if he was a beeble on an entomologist's table! It's awful to think of! He's so *alive*, you know."

"Yes." Archie proffered details. "It started after that last big game that he played. His papers for classes became freaky, and he would disappear for days."

"Where would he go?"

"I asked him one time—I've been pretty close to him. 'Oh, I've been out in the woods, with the wind,' he said. Then he began stopping strangers and asking them curious questions."

"What sort? I mean, did they all point to any one thing?"

"No. He asked whether they had heard the wind last night, or whether they understood sunlight. He would tell people that their ties didn't suit them, and inquire why they wore this or that color. Then there was the football dinner at the Country Club. Kemp, of the Athletic Board, was making a speech, when a French window behind him blew open—it was a stormy night—and he started to shut it. Landridge, who was seated far down the table, jumped up with a yell and shouted to him not to shut the window. Kemp—who, of course, knew nothing about the other things—tried to pay no attention, because there had been enough flasks passed around to explain any amount of yelling; but Landridge started for him. Some one grabbed Barry, and was straightarmed into a chair. Kemp had shut the window, and he tried to keep it shut, but Barry knocked him out of the way, shouting something in a great voice—in the bedlam, no one noticed what he said. Then he jerked open the window."

"Did he try to get out?"

Archie smiled fleeting acknowledgment.

"Oh, it's not claustrophobia—it's not as simple as that. He just stood there for a minute, and suddenly it was all over. He shut the window and went back to his chair again. It got around, of course, that he was drunk, which wasn't in the least true."

Lon drew out cigarettes, silently lighted Archie's and his own, and waited behind the brown, blue-edged smoke.

"Well, nothing happened for a month," Archie went on. "Then came the thing about the moon tones. I went past the Kappa house one night, very late. It was close to Christmas, cold, and with a brilliant moon. I saw somebody standing in the side yard, bareheaded. It was Barry,

in pyjamas. His head was thrown back, his eyes were shut, and his face was turned up to the moon. He seemed to be listening, yet he was making a strange whispering noise. It—I was scared. He didn't see me at all until I spoke. Then he turned. You know that El Greco picture of St. Somebody seeing heaven. Well, his face looked like that—*lit*, somehow. He told me to listen. Then he began about the moon tones. I wish I could have written what he said. He said that the moonlight sang in certain tones, and that all over the world people could communicate with one another by finding their own particular tones corresponding to the stages of the moon, and then singing—in their minds. That's what he was doing, he said."

Archie paused, and passed a hand across his forehead.

"It was weird, that big fellow standing there, and talking like that, with a sort of glamour on his face. I couldn't get him into the house for fifteen minutes. I pretended I had come to stay for the night at the Kappa house, and finally got him to bed. Lord knows how long he had been out there in his pyjamas. Any one else would have died of pneumonia. I was afraid to leave him alone, but I was more afraid to stay. Twice he started going out—once through the window—but I said that he could sing just as well inside. The moon shone across his bed, and he lay there making this singing, whispering noise like nothing *human*. Toward morning he went to sleep.

"The next day I went straight over to Fenerick, and blurred the whole business. A week later it was given out that he'd had a nervous breakdown, and Fenerick took him down to San Francisco, and put him under Cavendish there. He's been back about two weeks—came for the California game. It's an interesting case, as well as a trying one, and I've been close to the whole thing—in fact, closer to him than any one else, except Helène."

Lon, quite unprepared, started so perceptibly that it made him flush into acute self-consciousness.

"Helène Suares?"

"Sure! Who else?"

Lon considered.

"I didn't know that they knew each other, except very casually."

"Oh, Lord! Why, they are practically engaged!"

Lon's face, he hoped, made no token of the sudden clamorings in his throat. However, it blasted the foundations of the theory that he had been building, block by block, during Archie's long recital. Abruptly he stood up.

"I'm going over to speak to Barry. He won't remember me, of course."

But Barry did remember. Lon's hand, dropped upon his shoulder, brought his head up. He stared for a moment. Then recognition swept his face with a flash of smile, its lines altered subtly, and the next instant Barry was on his feet, one muscular hand grasping Lon's, the singular individual beauty of him signally projected and radiant.

"Why, hello, Lon! Didn't know you were around here at all!" They settled into chairs. "I heard you'd been out of the country some place, going to school." Barry slumped down until his head sank forward on his chest, and looked up at Lon, still smiling from under his thick brows. "Like it?"

This unwonted loquacity demanded proportionate response. Lon dilated, with incidents chosen particularly for the other's interest, upon his experiences at Oxford; and in the half hour that followed he studied Barry, seldom taking his glance from the apparently musing figure across the table.

Lon realized that Barry Landridge certainly was not handsome. His dark eyebrows scrolled too astonishingly back and up toward his tawny hair. His big, flat-set ears peaked grotesquely. His mouth, under a short, tipped nose, widened and lifted in a ragamuffin grin that emphasized a spare curve of jaw and a sufficiently basic chin. Nevertheless, over the frank virility of the face, with its harmony of skin and color, there seemed to fall a kind of luminous mantle that lay upon it like a kind of glamour.

Then Barry abruptly launched a torpedo which all of Lon's tact rushed to meet, or deftly to avoid.

"I suppose they've told you," he said, in his sliding, careless diction, still like an undergraduate's, "that I've been off my nut?"

He looked inquiringly across at Lon, who vainly sought a cue from Archie or Phil. As none was possible under the deeply inquiring eyes of Barry, Lon essayed amused flippancy.

"Oh, yes! Probably you showed some imagination, and weren't understood."

"Right!" agreed Barry. "Why, nobody understands at all! I'm all right now, though," he quickly added, but by this time Lon knew how surely he was not.

In the breaking up of the group, a moment later, Barry held out his hand, and grinned.

"I'm coming down to make you play me a tune," he announced, looming down on Lon from five superior inches of height.

"Any time, Barry," replied Wickwire. Barry swung out, with Phil Van Dusen at his heels, like a sleepy pug footing a troubled panther.

II

"Now just what did you do?" marveled Archie Edwards, as Lon, outside, trod upon the starter of his car. "He never does that—never deliberately wants to see people. He'll probably come at four o'clock in the morning!" Archie harked back to it a little indignantly. "That beats me, why he actually wants to see you. It's as if—"

Here he stopped and looked curiously at Lon.

That young man's mind had thrown out all but one thing, and now he voiced it:

"How's Hélène?"

Archie's earlier and unexpected announcement had lain beneath the last hour like a wrinkle in a blanket, and had given to Lon's quickened mind various pictures of Barry and Hélène together—Barry's tawny hair with Hélène's fingers through it, Barry's highly adequate arms doing all the things they so handsomely might, Barry's bronze face bent over the black bewilderment of Hélène's head—

"Hélène? Oh, you haven't seen her?" returned Edwards.

"Do you think I'd be driving you home at 2 A.M. if I had? Kindly remember that I didn't get in until six o'clock."

"Of course! She's"—Archie groped a little for the fitting term—"she's *all right*. I haven't seen her much lately. Of course, this thing with Barry—it's been very hard for her."

"With Barry?"

Lon drove straight past Archie's house and out along the boulevard to the Sound. That young man's failure to protest pointed the way to his sense of the growing importance of their talk.

"Yes. The whole development has been since the summer before last, when you saw her in London. It began the fall she came back—Barry's last year in college. As a matter of fact, she's the only girl that he ever played around with. Even, *Helène* couldn't help being flattered, for he was a personage, a campus god; but that doesn't fully explain it, because, apart from his being a personage, I can't imagine what else, being *Helène*, she would see in him. It seems queer, doesn't it?"

"It does," Lon replied, unable to keep the dryness from his tone.

Meanwhile the "queerness," to Lon, of whatever relation or intimacy had been established, was as nothing when set in the much more palpable queerness of *Helène's* astounding reticence in all her frequent and intimate correspondence with him while he was away.

He drew Archie's veil of silence by asking the surmised causes of Barry's trouble.

"Apparently they were many," Archie replied. "Congenital weakness, manifesting itself in a breakdown of certain cells under responsibility; the belated effect of war shock; a blow on the head during a game, with consequent pressure upon certain centers. They say that if one could get through to his real mind, his unconscious core, it might right things. What I really think I've never told, and I wouldn't tell you except for what happened to-night—the way Barry took to you. It's queer—you're a psychologist, and you may not think—but please don't laugh at me!"

Lon turned abruptly.

"Laugh? I'm scarcely in a laughing mood. Anyhow, I hope I'm not that kind of a psychologist. Go on!"

"All right!" said Archie. "To begin with his last game, then, for that's where I first began to—to notice things enough to put them together. When the team came out of the athletic house, Barry wasn't with them. Everybody thought, of course, that he was still inside, having a last word with Fenerick. Then Fenerick came charging out of the dressing room door—you know that little run of his, like a worried spaniel—and talked to Parsons, and waved his arms. A few of us—I had sneaked down to the bench—knew that something was up. 'Where's Barry?' people began to ask; but he had been late before, so nobody paid much attention. Just then the Californians came on, and every

one began watching Maller's forward passing; but I was looking around, I had marine glasses; and I think I was the only one who saw where Barry came from, just half a minute before the whistle blew—not out of the athletic house, but out of the woods behind it. You remember the tall trees that come right up behind that side of the field, to the south and west? I happened to be looking in that direction. He came"—Archie struggled for words—"like a cloud of wind. He wasn't running, but you had a sense that he melted through the branches, and made no effort. I watched him through the glasses, and it seemed to me"—again Edwards fumbled—"that part of the woods came with him, a sweep, a rush, of something else, something that wasn't human.

"I couldn't say what it was. I couldn't see anything, exactly, and yet—you know how you glimpse things out of the tail of your eye that vanish before a straight look? It was like that. It seemed as if there was something behind and around Archie that carried him over the three-foot fence. He was on the field before any one knew it. He came up to Amberly, their captain, shook hands, won the toss, and then dropped back to his position. I never took my glasses off him. He looked as he had that night in the moonlight—like something that I don't know how to describe."

Lon's silence held while the other lit a fresh cigarette from the old one.

"It was a crisp, still day, with a few big clouds in the west, lots of sun, and no wind. We kicked off to them, and they ran it back and back, to our five-yard line. Then we held them for downs, and got the ball. Barry dropped back to punt. Everybody waited. You could hear the signals crack out and echo."

Archie drew deeply on his cigarette and jerked it from his mouth, and into his voice there crept a quaver.

"Then the ball snapped back. Barry waited, too. He held the ball up, high—higher than punting position—with a gesture like a kind of invocation. Just before he kicked it, out of nowhere there swooped down a sudden gale of wind—you could hear it like a wave breaking. It was so unexpected that Maller, who had broken through and would certainly have blocked the kick, threw his arms across his face as if he'd been struck, and the ball—well, you know what it did—it broke the world's

record. The wind roared down the field with it. Everybody's hat blew off, papers flew, and the trees to the south, where it came from, sent a cloud of red and yellow leaves all over the field. Cahill, one of the Californians in my fraternity, told me afterward that he never knew such a thing. The suddenness and force of it hit them all, half blinded them. There was something about it, he said, that just plain scared him. It lasted only half a minute, and then suddenly died down again."

Archie drew breath.

"Well, I'm no sports reporter, and anyhow, the game itself doesn't matter. They had a better team, as a whole, though of course no one up to Barry. He literally kept them from scoring; but we couldn't score, either. Then came the final thing. There was only about a minute to play, and they were on our thirty-yard line. The sun was getting low, and the shadows of the tree tops lay sharp across the field. I don't remember when I first noticed them, or how I happened to, but I did."

Archie paused for a moment, and Lon saw his hand shake a little over his cigarette—his third—before he went on.

"Well, the shadows of the trees were moving—shifting, changing their outlines, leaping in huge masses across the field and back. There was something incoherent and yet *ordered* about it, like a rhythm that one hasn't quite caught. It was so extraordinary that for a minute I forgot the game, I even forgot Barry, and looked up at the tree tops."

His hand tightened suddenly on the other's arm.

"Lon, they were *still*. There wasn't a branch stirring—not a twig. I looked back to the field, and there they were, those tumultuous shadows. They jumped farther and farther toward Barry, who was waiting to receive the ball—to pass, as every one supposed.

"Well, it so paralyzed me that I've no clear idea of what happened. The shadows reached him just as the ball came back. He raised it, as he had before, with that same strange motion. Then—I don't know, but there came that swooping wind again, but from the other direction, this time, so as to be behind him. He was running down the field, and with him went something else. It seemed to me that part of the shadows broke off and traveled with him. All I saw, with the glasses, which I

turned on him quick enough, was a swirl of leaves, yellow and red. They hung around him like an aura. I suppose they were all over the field, till I took the glasses down; but they weren't.

"He ran seventy yards straight down the field, with little interference. No one had been expecting it, and the signals were for a pass. He simply flew. It was the same kind of effortless motion that I saw when he came out of the woods. In that roaring turmoil of wind, he seemed just to melt through the Californians. He made his touchdown, and the goal was kicked. Then the whistle blew, and there was a perfect riot. As if the wind had scattered and lifted them, the crowds poured over the field, howling. The excitement that drove them surged and spread. They shrieked for Barry, but he had gone. Every one thought that it was his modesty—typical enough—and that he had run to the athletic house, to get away from the crowd; but I knew. He had gone back to the woods!"

Archie sank back with a long, tired sigh. When he went on again, his voice was even, toneless.

"And there I found him. I got caught in the mob, and it took time getting out; but when I finally reached the edge of the woods, I felt as if something stopped me." He was silent for a moment. "With every step I took, I seemed to be pushed back. It was much darker under the trees, and very quiet, but overhead the wind still kept up. I kept on going, getting horribly afraid—afraid for myself and for Barry. Then I saw him. There was a little glade, filled with deep green light. He was lying in the middle of it, his face down to the earth, the football where it had rolled. I got to the edge of the clearing, and looked through something—I had the sense of that—at Barry, lying with his arms and legs spread out, and looking as if he were pressed, somehow, into the ground. Then, suddenly, everything was empty. Whatever had been there before, and had been filling the clearing, had gone. There was no wind. I ran to Barry. He sat up and stared at me without seeing me.

"'What, are you here?' he said. 'You don't belong.'

"I could only stare. His eyes seemed like green flames; and then there came something that was, in a way, the most terrible of all. In that stillness a little

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wind hummed around his head, like a living creature with wings, flew off, shook one branch of a tree, and was gone. Barry looked at me then, laughed queerly, and got up slowly.

"Gee, what did I say that for?" he said. "Let's go back. I ran away from the crowd. They'll be gone now."

"Suddenly he seemed to have grown shy and somehow ashamed. He looked almost commonplace and tired. The sweat had dried in streaks on his face. We tramped back through the woods without a word."

At the end of a long silence, Lon spoke. Archie would not have known his voice, it was so packed with excitement.

"Does any one else know this?" he asked.

"No. I told you you're the only one. Even Barry has probably forgotten. I wouldn't have told you, except—"

"Except what?"

"Except for to-night—for the way Barry took to you, and seemed to sense you. Lon"—Archie's voice was very low—"I believe that you, and probably you alone, can help him."

"I? How? Why?"

"How I don't know, but why—well, because"—he brought it out at last, the coping, the cap, of the whole astounding recital—"because you are a little that way too, Lon, and for that reason you can get through to him as no one else can. You can sense it, and yet stay outside of it."

Archie's words created in Lon a deep but inexplicable agitation. He touched the other sharply.

"What do you mean?"

Archie answered the question with profound earnestness.

"I think," he said slowly, "that Barry is going back into something that isn't human at all, as we understood it. Probably he always had the germ of it. Think of the marvelous ease with which he does every *natural* thing—swimming, running, all forms of athletics. The tragedy of it is that it has grown, this invasion of him."

Lon flashed a sentence:

"It's a possession! His human qualities are being dispossessed by—others."

Archie stared at his friend solemnly.

"So you know!" he said softly.

Lon made a bewildered gesture.

"I don't know anything. I don't know just why I said that. I felt—"

Archie caught it up.

"That's it—you felt. You're sensitive enough to the unknown things to feel with Barry, and yet not be carried away by them, as he is being carried away. That's why he took to you so this evening. That's why you, the psychologist, can help him."

Irrationally, a fragment from one of Hélène's letters darted before Lon's mental vision:

I would always feel about you, *mon cher*, that you were the one person of all I know who filled me with security.

He laughed suddenly, jarringly, and started the motor.

"Let's go home," he said. "I've had about all I can stand for one night!"

In silence they drove back. Through Lon Wickwire's mind there came another sentence of Hélène's, which had puzzled him:

If Barry comes to see you, let him have his own way. Don't cross him.

This thin, bright edge of warning shone like a keen blade through the furious circling of his fantastic conjectures about Barry, Hélène, and himself. It divided the troubled current of his thoughts, producing eddies that bore him, as the dawn was breaking, into the soundless tides of sleep.

III

It was characteristic of the Suares family, Lon reflected next evening, that they should live where they did. Except the president's house, theirs was the only one upon the whole vast campus. It stood upon a gentle slope among cedar trees that framed far-off glimpses of the Sound and of the mountains beyond. It antedated most of the university buildings, and had settled down to its last long sleep, as dwellings so definitely do sometimes, pulling over its rather pointed shoulders a great coverlet of English ivy.

An open space of turf stretched around it, with only a broken line of basswoods suggesting division from the campus. Here, in summer, one might see Professor Suares, his sleeves rolled up and his coat off, pottering among his rosebushes and rhododendrons as blissfully as if he were not a great authority on the Provençal language and literature.

Through the darkness, as his car neared the house, Lon saw the arched windows

glowing with an older and softer radiance than electricity provides. The candlelight brought him closer to Helène than all the letters that had streamed between England and America.

She met him at the door. Through its tight scrim curtains he had a momentary veiled glimpse of her head as she came, with the candles behind her—a swift, gliding silhouette, with the light caught in gold filaments around its edges. Then the door was open, and he was inside, and Helène, quite astoundingly, had taken both his hands and kissed him. The astonishment lay, not in the kiss, but in the decided initiative taken by Helène. Lon, alert to shades and variations, felt in it a certain eager tenderness and sympathy, and behind these, half caught, perhaps a tinge of pity.

This feeling swept through his consciousness and was instantly gone, drowned in the waves of sudden emotion that her kiss, her hands, the odor of her hair brought to him. Then she held him off at arm's length, looking at him with her head a little sideways and her eyes all sparkles.

"*Mais, mon cher*, you have not at all changed!"

"I hope not! What did you expect—white hair and a beard like Arkel? It's been—how long?"

"A year from this summer past. And me, Ro-nald—you think that I have changed, yes?"

He looked at her so straight that presently something of the sparkle left her eyes and a flush came up her cheeks.

"I think you have changed—a little," he said.

Thus he gave the first tangible touch—a touch as preliminary as the velvet outstretched paw of a kitten—to the packet that lay unopened between them.

Helène had no intention that it should be opened just yet. She led him into the drawing-room. Lon glanced around with complete satisfaction, and with a new respect and delight engendered by two summers of continental roving. He realized the beauty of the room now—the soft depths of the tapestries, the lovely lines of the old Empire furniture. Even the American mantelpiece had subtly taken on a purely French look.

The only light came from multitudes of candles, and from the flicker of the coal fire. Helène brought him to the couch be-

fore it, and pushed forward cigarettes and matches, talking eagerly.

"Oh, I have so much to ask! You saw my cousin in Geneva, *n'est-ce pas?* Is not Denise charming? She wrote to me of you."

"I liked her a lot," returned Lon, falling in with the obvious scheme of surfaces. "She was so appallingly frank!"

Helène, beside him, tucked one foot under her.

"My dear! She said in a letter that you were a *petit joli crapaud!*"

She laughed at that, and watched him—watched him, as he perfectly well knew, with an intentness far deeper than this froth warranted.

Lon, returning her searching look, was quite sure that he had never seen anything so lovely, so palpably what Americans, in enraptured moments, are pleased to term "French." Informing and illuminating her sparkle and her outward allure, as a patina may heighten the beauty of a fine bronze, there glimmered something of the remote, moonlit quality of a *Pierrette* wandering down a forgotten garden. She had a dreaming loveliness which may best be called *lointaine*. It was by that very name that Lon, first knowing her, and turning with all the fastidiousness of a delicate mind to this quality rather than to any other, had chosen to call her *la Princesse Lointaine*.

Here, then, she sat, once more an actuary before him, looking, in the candlelight, exactly the part. Her hair, very fine, blue-black, curving here and there like gently moved waves, floated rather than hung around the shining pallor of her face. Her eyes, unexpectedly and darkly fringed with gray, had grown black and gleaming with the night, as they always did.

Lon watched her spring up and cross the room for Denise's letter, and noticed the flowing of her young body beneath the thin black fabric that she wore. There was something familiar about the wavelike ease of her motion. He suddenly knew. It reminded him of Barry's. It was lighter, subtly altered and smoothed, but no more graceful.

This recognition, this instantly acknowledged kinship between them, hurt Lon like a sharp sword cut. It sent to his lips the questions—the question—which he had not been able to solve during these last twenty-four hours. As Helène returned with the

letter, he rose to meet her, standing very straight, his legs a little apart.

"*Princesse*, tell me—about you and Barry. I heard last night that you are practically engaged. Is that so?"

Directness of this kind is not a characteristic of the French mind. Helène's cheeks turned bright red, and her words rushed between French and English like frightened hens between hedges.

"*Mais*, Ro-nald—*qu'est-ce que*—I don't understand!"

Her confusion was so instant and so complete that he could not but laugh, even through his steady look and the tightening of strange feelings within him. This sight of Helène—this sudden vision of her under her own candlelight and in the very perfume of her presence—brought home to Lon his love for her, as all the brilliant and whimsical letters of eighteen months had never brought it home. It was this—this final and sudden setting in motion of a gradually built machine, this fire of life breathed into an image long made ready—that had swept his carefully planned approaches away in one swift sentence, landing him, as it were, before the door of the castle to which he had expected to ride by the curving road of gentle conversational advance.

His pause had given Helène time, under that steady look, to rush all her reserves to portcullis and bastion. She began very smoothly. Her soft voice, with its rounded accent, flowed over and through the rougher structure of English like a small stream among bowlders.

"*Mais*, Ro-nald, of course I have seen Barry very much. He came at first, like many of the other boys, just sometimes. I was very amused. He was so—so still—you know?"

Lon nodded.

"Yes, I know."

Helène's head went back in a silvery cascade of laughter, which had almost a natural cadence.

"Ro-nald, he would sit there in the big chair and not say one word. That was at first, in the spring before the last. Then in the fall, when I came back, after you and I were in London together, he came more often. It was very funny. I was amused to have this big boy, whom they all thought so wonderful at the football, coming here and just sitting—so."

She sank down in keen mimicry of

Barry's spine-end slump. Lon, as calmly as he might, swept her story aside.

"Helène, please tell me—are you in love with Barry?"

She became very still, like a candle flame that for a moment burns straight. She looked at Lon with a sudden clearness, like crystal water. The perfume and the sweetness of her had disappeared. Lon's thoughts flashed to a birch tree without leaves, or a newly peeled stick—something strong and rigid, something vigorously young, stripped, fearless.

"*Mais oui, mon ami*, of course!" she said simply.

Then she bent herself suddenly, and her rigid strength was gone. Her hands reached out to Lon, and caught his own. A sudden pain swept through him. He cried out, and of themselves his arms pulled her close to him.

The finality of it filled and lifted him. Helène responded for a moment to the fullness of his kiss, and then lay, quite relaxed, against him.

The wave passed, and left him trembling, with a distant sadness of mind, a sudden loneliness. He rose and stood before the fire, with his back to her. Presently he said, quietly enough:

"I'm sorry I did that. After what you had just said, I suppose I ought to have bowed and murmured congratulations."

In the succeeding moments of silence it seemed to Lon that the bitterness rose in him like a physical thing, so that his muscles tightened, his fingers and teeth clenched. The crest of the wave approached. He struck his hands together, and walked about the room.

Helène suddenly ran to his side. He stopped.

"Please," he said, through his teeth, "*don't touch me!*"

Like a tide the bitterness swelled, washing through him. Things changed their aspect. The details of the room were lost in a blur.

Then the wave passed. The furniture, the candles, the fire, returned to their places. Lon wiped his forehead and mouth, and dropped into a chair. He looked up, and saw Helène's expression of amazement, fear—yes, and pity. In the coldness that was settling through him it stirred a flicker of wonder.

"How could you have been so cruel?" he asked. "How could you?" he repeated,

as she did not speak to him. "With your imagination and sympathy, it seems so incredible!"

She shook her head, still wordless. Lon looked at her steadily and with increasing detachment.

"Since a year ago this past summer, since our time together in London, you've let me more and more believe that you cared for me. You must have known me inside out. I told you enough. At the same time, all the time, this other thing was happening." The young man's scorn ripened on his lips. "Oh, Hélène, you have been treacherous!"

The ugly word seemed to strike her like a shaft. It broke her stillness. She lifted her chin.

"*Non!*" she cried suddenly. "No—that is not so! You do not understand!"

Lon stood up, an expression of bitterness playing across his sensitive lips, his fine-drawn face.

"No, I suppose I don't," he said slowly; "and I take no interest in any explanation you might be able to make."

He turned toward the door, a little blindly, but she was before him.

"You shall not go in this way! Please, Ro-nald! You must listen to me! It is not just!"

Her last word created a little space of light within him. He looked at her, very beautiful in her earnestness. He turned back to his chair.

"You're right," he said. "It isn't fair—not to listen."

IV

HELÈNE slowly sat down on the couch. On her face the firelight flickered. She looked into the coals, then at Lon.

"There is so much I want to say, and it is so—how you say?—untouchable—intangible? *Oui, c'est le mot.*"

She paused for an instant, and then suddenly went on in French:

"I can tell you better so. To speak in English gives me a little too much the sense of paying attention to words."

Again she hesitated. Then she turned toward him, with a whimsical little hand outflung.

"*Mon cher*, you must remember this—I was brought up in Paris as a *jeune fille* of good family. You know, since being there, a little of what that is. One is so protected that one grows up in a shell.

One does not feel, because one is not allowed to; unless one rebels and slips out for adventure. I never did that, though many of my friends did. Ro-nald, until I came here at the age of eighteen, I had never been for one minute alone with a young man. You are a psychologist—you know what that would do. I imagined a great deal, but I was asleep, save my mind, and I did not—"

"But you weren't asleep—with me," interrupted Lon.

Hélène nodded.

"Indeed, yes! You kissed me, to be sure, but in this astounding country of yours that seemed not so much. I had no standard of comparison. You were the first person in my life that I came to know well. I liked you. You spoke to me of home in so many ways—Debussy, Flaubert, Cézanne—it was all so charming and so new. Then, after a few months, you went away. We wrote."

She stopped again.

Lon waited, aware of a significance in the deliberateness with which she turned to him.

"Ro-nald, I fell in love with your mind—so quick, so deep, so amusing, with so much of the best of my country and of yours in it. I looked always for your letters. When we were together in London, it was all so fast, we sped so quickly on the wave, was so nice to have you there, that I didn't analyze very much. I was too happy. I was sure I loved you. I knew then that perhaps you loved me; though you didn't really say till later, when you wrote to me again—"

"The Houses of Parliament, from Westminster Bridge, by moonlight, August 15," quoted Lon from his mind, twisting suddenly under the rush of sweetness, now turned to pain, that the memory brought.

Hélène nodded.

"Just so—the Houses of Parliament by moonlight."

From her tone one sensed that she was looking at something incredibly remote, with the small clearness of a miniature presented by reversed opera glasses. She went on, her voice a little lower and swift, and somehow altered a little. Lon, vividly watching her, had a sense of the first warmth of sunrise in the cool dawn sky.

"Then, Ro-nald, Barry began to come; and almost at once I felt something new, though I didn't know just what. Remem-

ber, I had no standards of comparison. I told you that I had always been asleep. Now I began to wake up."

She paused for a moment. Then, with her eyes on the fire, and with increasing rapidity, she continued:

"Ro-nald, from almost the first time he came, strange things began to happen within me. I felt more and more that there was a space between us like a vacuum, which tried to close itself, to pull me to him. I wanted to put my hands upon his hair, and upon his forehead—I wanted to do these things!"

Lon sank lower in his chair and turned his face away. Hélène's voice, flowing, dreamy—almost, it seemed to him, indifferent to his listening—went on:

"I was ashamed at first; then I was curious, and then—frightened. These things, they were so beautiful, so strong; and they grew. That was what frightened me—they grew. I was afraid that some day I would stop pulling away from him, and just let that vacuum close itself. I came to feel like a spring, always stretched. I ached with it. Of course, I did not let him see it. I would move across the room. I would talk, talk, talk; but all the time, when he was not looking, I would watch him as he sat—the way his throat seemed like bronze above his white collar, the look of sculpture in his wrists. I would know nothing of what I was saying—nothing at all! He came more often—almost every night; but he would go home early, because of the training. It seemed to me that a kind of light had fallen upon everything, like a dawn that stayed always dawn."

A little silence, and then again Hélène's voice, quiet, but like blown embers. She seemed to have entirely forgotten Lon Wickwire.

"Then, one evening in October, we walked out along the path by the cliffs. The air was very still, and the sky green with twilight, yet with a glow. We walked silently, like one person. We came to a high place, with trees behind it, and the sea and sky in front. We stood close together. We did not touch each other. Then, at last, he stooped a little toward me, and I knew—"

"Don't!" Lon's voice broke sharply across the almost unbearable beauty in Hélène's. "For God's sake, don't go on, Hélène!"

The shocked note in his voice surprised

Lon himself. The girl looked at him with suddenly amazed eyes.

"Comment?"

"I—it's too intimate—I don't belong—you shouldn't tell me things like that!"

"But why not? I had to tell you. You deserved to know, so that you might understand. Cannot one permit one's self honesty, for once, at least?"

He shook his head, and began pacing up and down the rug, driven by agonies of jealousy that shook through him like successive breakers. Through them there wove irresistibly a thread of thought—the idea of Barry and Hélène together. There was a gesture of fate in it. They seemed so much, within physical limits, an expression of the same thing—mates—how he hated the word!

What was he suddenly trying to remember about Barry? Barry and Hélène—his own Hélène—

He dropped beside her and buried his face in her hands, as they lay upon her lap.

"I can't let you go—I can't!" he cried.

She smoothed his hair.

"*Mon cher*, there is no choice. Surely you see that now!" She looked beyond him into the fire, and her voice sank again. "Beside this, everything else is pale and without substance."

There stretched a long interval of silence. Lon's head was still upon her lap. Above him her eyes changed slowly. The ecstasy in them faded before dark, hesitant trouble. Lon voiced it, raising his head.

"But now, with this other thing, this—
He hesitated.

"Barry's madness, you would say?" She brought it out quite calmly, yet under the tone Lon instantly caught a spirit of defense. "He is not mad, *mon cher*, in spite of what many stupid people have said. He is no more mad than Rousseau was mad." She paused for a moment, as if carefully choosing how much to admit. "And yet," she continued at length, "there is something."

"There certainly is!" Lon voiced it dryly, sitting up against her knees, and staring into the fire. "Was he never—strange—with you? Did you ever notice anything?"

Again the pause—the small sense of building defenses.

"But how stupid a person would be with no strangeness!" she replied. "I found behind his quietness a curious fancy and

wish, and of what it held inexorably before him.

Here, then, was a key in his hands, with which he might open, and had been implored to open, that house of whimsical windows and phantom candles, and patches of sudden sunlit laughter across perfumed shadows, of which he had fully believed himself to be the rightful owner. It was a strange decision that he had to make. Suppose he deliberately refused—or failed—to unlock the door. Suppose the other man remained always outside, retreating farther and farther into the darkness of a failing mind, and finally disappearing into some hideous abyss. Might not the beloved house—in time—open its casements for himself? Might not its bright gardens be his, as they had always been? Might he not at last win to the very tower of ivory that had opened under that other's fine careless hand?

The picture floated clear before Lon's mind. The years, in which he had only to wait, opened to him. It would be so easy! He need only appear to fail in attempt to help Barry. He need only deny his ability to do so. He might even use his power in the other direction, and—

But before *that* suggestion, insidious, terrible, he retreated as from an evil odor, in frank horror of himself. He had a glimpse of a treacherous hand upon a tawny head, forcing it, as it tried, tried to rise, back below the waters of insanity.

He began walking swiftly again up and down the room, his face twisted.

"I want her, I want her!"—his tread shaped the refrain.

"The question is, you fool, do you love her as well as want her?" argued an answering voice. "If you do, there's only one course—try to save him for her. If you don't, stop pretending to be decent. Push him over the edge, if you can, and try to take her!"

"God, I can't do that! I can't, I *can't!* Helène, *Helène!* Oh, God, decide this awful thing for me!"

He threw himself down on the couch under the lamp, his arms crumpled under him, his fingers tightening at his throat, his body shaking.

Gradually he became quieter; slowly he relaxed. Stillness settled like a sinking darkness over the room. The fire made small irrelevant sounds, falling together. It was the stillness of late, late night, of the

tide turning toward morning—the hour of waiting. In the utter silence, one could hear time pause.

Round the high-perched old house there began to run a faint flurry of wind. Leaves, sere and old, rose from the crumpled corners of the garden, and fluttered aimlessly through the darkness outside the long French doors. A pendent trail of vine tapped irrationally, spasmodically, on the glass.

Then, subtly, slowly, the tapping began to change. Out of its unequal intervals there began to emerge a pattern. By imperceptible degrees its irregularity became a rhythm, a recurrence—one, one, two, three, four—pause; one, one, two, three, four—pause.

For a long time this ran through Lon's exhausted mind without recognition. Gradually it made its way, like a clock's tick, into his consciousness, and suddenly he was acutely aware of it, gentle, insistent, somehow powerful, as if this tapping, tapping were the apex and focus of infinitely greater forces outside the room.

Sharply he raised his head. Then he froze into immobility and stared. A detached portion of his mind began instantly:

"Hallucination—very clear. Excellent example of worry—failure to keep out the unconscious through exhaustion."

For outside the window, like a green mask through the glass, hung Barry's face, staring at him, and, faintly gleaming in the shadow, Barry's big hand tapped with the loose coil of vine upon the glass of the double door.

As Lon looked, the mask altered suddenly into a grin, and the hand thumped boisterously on the pane. He sprang across the room as if projected by the recoil of his taut nerves, and jerked open the door.

Somehow Barry was inside, his huge hand grasping Lon's, the singular individual beauty of him projected and radiant as he smiled at his friend.

"Thought you never would wake up," he said, his voice, low-pitched, curiously filling the room. "I was taking a walk. I saw your light, and thought I'd drop in."

Lon's mind refused to focus. He stared stupidly at Barry—at the bronze V of his neck above his open shirt, at the lines of his tall figure, drawn keenly by his close, dark sweater and riding breeches, at the tawny, wind-curled hair above his dark brows.

Lon stared, speechless, until Barry, mildly inquiring, dropped a gentle hand upon his shoulder.

"It's all right, isn't it? You're not busy, or anything?"

It jerked the other into sensibility.

"Why, of course it's all right! Excuse me, Barry. I wasn't asleep, as a matter of fact—a little muddled. Sit down." He indicated the couch under the lamplight. "Let me fix up the fire."

Lon fussed with the wood box and the tongs, and laid on logs, taking an unnecessarily long time to do it, that he might in some degree contemplate this last, this most astounding happening. He felt curiously numb and without volition, as if he were moving on a dark stage through a drama in which he played the leading rôle.

This sudden appearance of Barry, who had stepped from the night as if from Lon's own dark and troubled brain, seemed like a final gesture of the fate that had encompassed him since his return, that had bound him so immediately and so amazingly with the other man. He felt now that whatever was to happen would happen despite him. The fact of Barry's coming had, in a way that Lon could not analyze, lifted the whole situation to a plane beyond any decision of his.

He crossed the room to get smokes. This, then, was the reason why he had refused all invitations and stayed at home! He lighted Barry's cigarette. As the match flared upon the visitor's face, the curious quality of it, its glow and glamour, suddenly shone out anew.

Barry glanced up, caught the directness of Lon's look, and answered it with a smile so gentle, with such a quality of sweetness and strangeness, that Lon found himself saying, to his own amazement:

"I'm awfully glad you came around, Barry! I was hoping that you would."

There he stopped, not knowing how to proceed, sure of himself, yet in some obscure way baffled. The sense of acting a part, of waiting until his cue arrived, grew on him.

"I wanted to see you—especially after the other night," returned Barry quietly.

He left it at that, as if he had said quite enough, as if he had fully explained his casual appearance at his friend's window at one o'clock in the morning.

"The other night, Barry?" Lon repeated questioningly.

He had settled himself across the fire, in the shadow, to watch.

"Yes," said Barry.

He paused, looking down, as if it was an effort to break his customary shy silence—as if, it suddenly flashed upon Lon, his natural mode of expression was not speech at all, but something else. Under Lon's attentive eyes he settled deeper into the couch, looked at the end of his cigarette, and gravely, absently, knocked the ashes on the floor. Then he glanced up, full at Lon's eyes.

"You know," he said, very simply and slowly, "I've—well, people say I've been off my nut; but you said they just didn't understand."

Again he stopped. Lon held his breath while the other struggled for words.

"Well, I don't think they did, but I'd like to know what they mean."

Lon, watching with intensity, leaned forward a little, but did not speak.

"Why, it's just natural," Barry went on, his eyes growing darker as he spoke, and the strangeness gathering on his face like a luminous veil. "It's the way the wind travels." His voice sounded suddenly soft and immense, like distant surf. "It's the way the trees move at night, when everybody's asleep. They go up, the insides of them, like dark balloons, all together, and start to move—to move across—across to the high places."

He had half risen, with an incredible swiftness, as if he had been lifted. His words seemed to rush and tumble in a torrent, and he was staring at Lon with a growing excitement. It had come so quickly, so dismally without warning, that Lon felt an overwhelming sense of panic. In a moment something would happen in the room—something monstrous. It hovered, vast, inimical. Huge soft things swept and buffeted at his mind.

"Come back, Barry! Come back!" was the unspoken cry of his soul.

For one terrible minute he kept his eyes upon the wild eyes opposite.

"Yes?" he heard his voice mechanically uttering. "How interesting!"

Then, amazingly, it had gone. Something had impended, threatened, and suddenly withdrawn. He found himself standing in a stiff, foolish attitude of expectancy, staring at Barry.

The latter sank back on the couch, which creaked under his weight. A curi-

ous look, as if he had tried to catch an illusion, crossed his face. Then he slowly smiled.

"I can reach him!" came unexpectedly to Lon, out of his still seething agitation. "I can hold his mind! I can turn him away from it!"

VI

BARRY WAS speaking in a quiet tone.

"You see, when I try to tell about it, it goes," he said.

He was so matter-of-fact, so much the inarticulate Barry Landridge, that Lon blinked and looked dazedly round the big, dim room. It was empty. It was entirely normal. He turned again to Barry, who was looking at his friend with bewildered earnestness.

"But *you* understand, don't you, Lon?" he asked.

Lon's reply had the sooth of the kindly physician.

"Yes, Barry, I think I do."

There was such immense relief in the way in which Barry stretched his long body and relaxed that Lon felt a rush of sudden and unqualified affection.

There ensued a brief silence, in which the fire cracked once or twice. Then Barry continued. His face was gentle and wholly human now—how could it change so, Lon marveled?—and upon it was quite a new expression of tenderness.

"You see"—he brought it out slowly, shyly—"I've got to be sure of myself, sure that I'm all right, because—well, you see—"

"Yes?" Lon took it up with a premonitory chill of dread.

"Yes—you see, I care an awful lot for Hélène."

"Ah!"

The monosyllable was stung out of Lon by the force of a quick antagonism, inevitable, hot. It passed over Barry's head, which was bent and humble, while his countenance was increasingly tender.

"It wouldn't be fair to her, if there was anything really wrong with me." Barry looked across into Lon's shadowed face, and leaned a little forward, his big hands clasped across his knees. "Now that you understand, do you think there really is anything wrong with me? If so, it wouldn't be fair. Is there? Is there, Lon?" he insisted.

He waited, and Lon, looking at him

across his own awakened antagonism, saw suddenly something stripped—a clean, strong young elm tree in the sun. In a flash, like the sounding of a gong, he saw Barry's essential oneness with Hélène, the beauty of them together, the quality of kinship, of resemblance, that he had already sensed in the girl. In a strange, intuitive glimpse he recognized the attraction that Barry held for her. With all this there came tapping at his mind the thing he knew about Barry—the thing he couldn't remember. What was it?

Probably it didn't matter; for in that flash of insight, in that sudden clarity of vision, in Barry's words "it wouldn't be fair," Lon knew that he had received his cue.

An enormous relief pervaded himself. Almost without volition he rose, crossed to Barry, and laid a hand on his friend's shoulder. He spoke with complete belief.

"I'm absolutely certain that there's nothing wrong with you that can't be cured."

Barry shot a big hand to Lon's. His eyes were as grateful as a dog's.

"Thanks, Lon!" he managed huskily.

Again Lon retreated to his chair in the shadow, and presently he began to talk in a gentle, even voice. He talked of anything and everything—of skiing at St. Moritz and punting on the Thames, of the scenic beauty of Capri and the good beer of Munich, until he saw Barry's eyes begin to glaze with sleepiness. Then, concentrating himself, and without a change in the even contour of his voice, he went on:

"I picked up some nice music while I was away, Barry. Shall I play some of it for you?"

Without waiting for a reply, he arranged a deep wing chair by the piano.

"Come and sit over here, where you can sprawl out comfortably. It's the only proper way to listen to music."

He drew the chair nearer to the piano. Barry obediently rose, with a sleepy smile, and settled himself into it, relaxing his head against the back. Lon, murmuring still, extinguished the light, so that only the fading embers of the fire cast a faint and uncertain glow through the room.

Barry yawned.

"I'll be so comfortable that I'll go to sleep," he said.

His voice rumbled from the darkness. He faced the piano bench, and, just beyond

it, the east window, through which he looked out upon a band of trees below a faintly luminous sky.

"Music's always better in the dark," returned Lon.

He stepped to the piano bench and struck a soft chord—a vague, beautiful thing like clouded moonlight. He repeated it in a descending scale of minor thirds, talking softly through the music.

"There's something restful and peaceful about this, Barry. What I'm going to play is a lullaby—a lullaby."

His fingers moved gently. He fervently blessed the veiled quiet of the instrument, voiced to velvety softness.

Then, without break, he swung into the alluring, rhythmic sway of the "Siegfried Idyl." He made a pattern of the first four bars, repeating them until they began to weave a restful monody, like waves rising and falling upon a smooth beach. As he played, he turned toward Barry, with his back to the window, and launched at the dim figure in the chair a low-toned but steady stream of talk.

"It is a love idyl, Barry—a song of rest, peace, and love—rest, peace, and love—love that dominates—that fills the place of everything else—of everything else—"

He sank his voice to a whisper, and finally stopped; but the voiceless thought went on, concentrated, intense, carried by the monotonous flowing of the music. Gradually he stilled even this, marking the rhythm, for a time, with a few faint chords, and then letting even these die away.

The stillness was like a cloak of sable velvet. The room had vanished in blackness, and from the chair came a low, regular breathing. Lon bent nearer and nearer over the unconscious figure, himself tense with concentration, driving his suggestion deep into the slumbering mind before him.

He was so intent that he was long in becoming aware of something else that had been happening while he worked. For a moment his eyes accepted the fact with incredulity, before it exploded in his mind, sharply breaking the current of his thought, and causing him to draw back. He became suddenly and awfully aware that Barry's face was no longer invisible—that upon it lay a faint and ghastly luminosity. He could distinctly see the tight-shut eyes, the hollows in the spare cheeks.

In the moment of mental paralysis that followed, Lon completely lost his estab-

lished control. In that same moment Barry's lids fluttered and rose, and his eyes stared fixedly past Lon, out of the window, into the sky.

Lon whirled and saw, with an inexplicable shudder, the old moon. It was in the last quarter, and from its faint beams there distilled a kind of terrible decay, a withered splendor wholly evil. It had risen above the trees, so that now it struck full on the face of Barry as he lay stretched out in the chair.

And as Lon looked, the lips of that blanched and enchanted face unclosed themselves, and sounds issued from them—if the thing that resulted could at all be called sound. Rather it was like an audible embodiment of the ancient, evil light, level and cold and faint, as if it reached him by some channel other than the ears, out of dead spaces beyond forgotten and frozen worlds.

It struck Lon with an overwhelming terror. It grew stronger and stronger. As if it formed a channel, as if it drew a passage through the chilling air, it began calling down, upon the causeway of the decaying light, something that reached into the room—something that attacked. Lon felt it draw him, pull him, into the beginnings of some terrible communion.

As if warding off a blow, he sprang up and snatched down the shade. Darkness clapped upon him, and he fell back, trembling, on the piano bench. Cold hung like a visible thing around them. The singing sound had abruptly ceased, and from the chair came a sigh.

With hands that shook, Lon touched the keys at random. The resultant discord boomed shockingly loud. With feverish eagerness he found the cords, and, shaken, ashamed, began once more to play the "Idyl." It spread like a grateful warmth through the darkness. Unaccountably, elements in the room fell back into their accustomed values, and the mysterious intrusion disappeared.

He steadied himself by playing until he could once more concentrate his thoughts, and then turned to his friend. Fortunately, Barry did not seem to have awakened. Lon could hear again his deep, regular breathing.

"You are asleep—deeply asleep. You are at peace. You have forgotten the moonlight. You have forgotten everything but your love for *Helène*. You are asleep,

asleep!" He pressed it, reiterated it, for a few moments. Then he asked gently:

"You are asleep, Barry?"

"Yes, Lon," the other's voice replied softly, distantly.

"But you understand me?"

"Yes," came in a faint whisper.

Lon bent nearer again.

"You have forgotten all alien thoughts. Your love for Hélène has driven them out. Rest, peace, and love—rest, peace, and love," he repeated again and again, driving his suggestion more and more strongly.

The rapport grew stronger. Lon felt the other mind passive, receptive, obedient. He lost all sense of time. Minutes, or hours, passed. The silence was broken only by Barry's low, regular breathing, and by the whispered cadence of Lon's words.

Then, abruptly, it came.

A circling dawn of sound outside the house—the wind—the wind, suddenly rising, hurrying around and around, seeking—and under it, through it, immense, hoarse, a ceaseless, prolonged humming.

Lon braced himself to meet it, to meet the thing that came with it, came flooding in waves through the room. It shook him. He leaned over Barry in agony.

"No, no! You do not hear it! You have forgotten—"

But, even as he spoke, Barry's voice sounded strangely:

"Let me go! Let me go! Oh, I must go—I am called!"

As his voice rose to a long wail, there came outside a tumultuous, prolonged, moaning roar. The French doors crashed open, and into the room hurled the wind. It pressed around them, immense, formless, laughing, triumphant. It flashed a last ember from the fire. Lon saw Barry stagger up blindly, clawing with his hands before him, as if to rid himself of the cobwebs that held him—saw him turn and sway, with incredible speed, toward the open doors. Above the roaring hum that had entered the room he heard Barry's voice, hoarse and huge and exulting:

"Out—out—out!"

Then panic fell upon Lon. Everything left him but a blind instinct to rescue his friend. He sprang upon Barry at the very doorsill, and grappled. They swayed. Lon felt the hot strength of the other's body. Then they slipped and crashed, tangled, to the floor, Barry above, breaking, as they went down, Lon's grip around his chest.

Barry flung his antagonist from him like a rag. Lon's shoulder struck against something columnar—the pedestal of the marble Psyche.

And then, in the instant of Barry's upward, roaring spring, in the instant when he stood stooped above the prostrate Lon, the statue shook, swayed, and fell, striking a glancing blow upon Barry's head. Lon saw the eager body go slack and totter. Then it sank down, an inert weight, across him. He felt one big hand, limp and warm, twitch for a moment upon his cheek and grow still.

With a long-drawn shout the wind whirled away, hummed high overhead, and was gone. From distant parts of the house came the sound of slamming doors and hurried, terrified voices.

VII

LON WICKWIRE and Archie Edwards tramped across the campus under the rare crystal of a blue January day and a brilliant Sunday sun, and came to pause before the entrance of the drive to Professor Suares's house.

"Coming in?" asked Lon, turning up the drive.

"N-no, I guess not." Archie appeared to deliberate. "Who are there? Is it a tea party?"

"Nobody but Hélène and Barry, I believe," replied Lon.

A faint crispness edged the speaker's tone, a tenuous echo of controlled nerves, which turned Archie's eyes full to Lon's face with a questioning look.

"You haven't seen them lately?"

"No"—Lon set it down flatly, a little defiantly.

"In other words, you haven't quite been able to face seeing them together," thought Archie, suddenly certain of what he had long suspected.

Affection kindled in his eyes, but he turned the talk swiftly, deftly.

"Lon, what do you really think about it? You must think something, one way or the other."

Lon shrugged.

"I don't. What use are theories, as long as he's cured? Everybody agrees on that, anyhow. It may be, as Hélène believes, that my suggestion made the change. It may be, as all the local doctors learnedly concur, that the knock on Barry's head and the slight concussion re-established a bal-

ance upset by the previous blow. But I know this—I tried!"

"You never really told me what happened that night."

Lon looked at him.

"Archie, I really don't know what happened, beyond what I've already said. There were—interruptions."

The other nodded grimly.

"There would be. Believe me, I can understand that—" His voice trailed off. Then, with characteristic impulsiveness, his words tumbled out. "Lon, I think it was wonderful of you, under the circumstances, to do that for Barry—for both of them. It was splendid, because," he rushed on, "I know how you felt about *Helène*."

Lon stopped him.

"Please, Archie, spare me the heroics." The edge in his voice sang, and he turned definitely toward the house. "Are you coming in?"

"No, indeed!" Archie almost visibly gave it the gesture of backing hastily away. "I'll be getting along. See you to-night."

"Not unless you come and help me pack."

The other's eyes goggled.

"Pack?"

Lon nodded.

"I've been offered a job on the *Argonaut*—a good experience, and I must take it now or leave it. Mother's coming over in April, and we're renting the place here to friends."

Archie stared.

"Good Lord, just like that!"

"Just like that. Come up to-night. We'll kill my last bottle of smuggled Five Star."

Lon turned and walked swiftly up the drive.

The maid let him in. *Helène* and Barry rose together from the couch before the fire. Lon stood in the doorway, quite unable, for a moment, to move, so strongly did the sense of the radiant completion of their companionship, the inevitability of it, rush out to him. Then came the girl's voice—her gay, smooth voice.

"Ah, Ro-nald! *C'est toi encore!*"

If he could only get over the feeling that always came to him in her presence! It made him a little dizzy.

She moved toward him quickly, with her hands out. As he entered the room, she lifted her face to him fully. It stopped him like a physical blow, and filled him with

such a sudden flood of dismay, of agitation, that he scarcely felt Barry's genial arm around his shoulders, scarcely heard his friend's deep—

"Hello, Lonny, old boy! How are you?"

At that first glimpse Lon knew that something had gone amiss. The certainty of it, like a bolt, flamed down through his mind. It momentarily touched a great flare, as if it had opened and closed the door of a lighted room; then it sank and was gone.

Barry was booming on at him:

"What's this about your going back to England again? You're not, are you?"

They had reached the couch and the tea table, and *Helène*, through the soft ritualistic clatter of the cups, took up Barry's question:

"Ro-nald, is it true? Father said that your mother told him, only to-day."

Lon continued to search her face. He tried to make her look up, but she concerned herself with lemon and sugar, talking meanwhile.

"Of course, father is the vaguest of men. He said you were to write for a group of people somewhere in England. How is that?"

She looked at him, at length, with bright eyes that said nothing.

"The *Argonaut*," returned Lon. "They offered me a job with them."

He heard himself explaining verbosely about articles and opportunities and contacts. He became acutely conscious how they looked, sitting around the fire. He felt how normal, how absurdly commonplace was their outward aspect—surfaces, patterns of words, masks of flesh, the glittering tea set, the crackling fire—thin simulacra, tenuous veils, so flimsy that if one poked a finger through any place the terrific unknown reality that lay behind might come spurting out!

He watched Barry watch *Helène*, as she poured the fragrant amber into peach luster cups. That tender look had become a habit on Barry's face. He caught Lon's eye and smiled affectionately, simply.

"Why are you going so far away?" he demanded.

It brought a little stillness, a momentary pause.

"One must eat," returned Lon, looking anywhere but at *Helène*. "It's a good job, and I expect to like it."

With that she got up, and went suddenly to the piano, very gay.

"Oh, Ro-nald, listen! I found this. Of course you know it, but I had forgotten it. How lovely it is!"

He remained on the couch, watching her. Barry sprawled in the big chair and fumbled for a cigarette. She began to play the "Siegfried Idyl."

Instantly Lon's eyes swung to Barry. The lighted match had stopped abruptly, halfway to the cigarette, and Lon, holding his breath, waited. As the music went on, over Barry's tanned, frank face there began to gather a strangeness, like the ghost of a mask—a quality intangible and alien, an evanescent and haunting glamour, which lay upon him like the reflection of a star upon a forgotten pool, radiant and wistful.

Lon suddenly found himself filled with inexplicable, burning sadness, and his eyes smarting with tears. Then, like a last gleam of sunlight upon mist, it faded, faded, went out—and across the music fell Barry's mellow, casual laugh.

"That's not a very lively tune, is it?"

That stopped her, so that she came and stood between them. Barry heaved up, towering above her.

"I want to show Lon that picture of the Olympic tryouts," he said. "The rotogravure paper's in your father's study."

He laid his big hand, muscular, faintly meshed with golden hairs, upon her shoulder, and pulled her gently to him.

Standing thus, side by side, it seemed to Lon that they forever etched themselves upon him. Barry's athletic body, supple, big, graceful—his spare face with the crown of sunburned hair, the simplicity in his kind eyes; and Helène—hers, too, were that sureness of line and that grace of flexible strength.

THE END

IN FAREWELL

THINK not, because my heart knew all your fragrance
And surged against your beauty yesterday,
I shall forget; my lips are only silent
For all the tortured things I may not say.

Such fragile dreams—star dust and you—to cherish
Against the coming of the long, gray year!
The little dreams that were too sweet for blooming—
Could I forget them, and your eyes, my dear?

Thelma Stillson

Yet in her Lon saw, under the intense focus of the moment, that the grace and the sureness were a channel rather than a force, a means rather than an end. That was the difference. They were, he realized, like two pages of the same rare, fine parchment, with an alphabet upon one and a sonnet upon the other.

The instant passed. Barry's fingers tightened gently around Helène's shoulder. Lon caught the sudden closing of her eyes, her faint tremor, and then, instantly, her brilliant smile at him, as he strode out.

Lon and the girl faced each other, wordless. Her smile had gone with Barry's going. Her hands went suddenly toward Lon, and she whispered the question that was staring out of her unmasked eyes.

"Oh, what have you done, what have you done?"

"I? I?"

The blank interrogation sank through Lon's echoing mind—sank and spread. Suddenly, as if it released a spring, there rushed up to him the overwhelming knowledge. The thing he knew about Barry and could not remember, the thing that he had known, without knowing, all along, was at last made unbearably clear in a terrific flash, in the desolation of Helène's eyes.

It was this—that in the very quality which Lon had striven to exorcise lay the basic attraction of Barry for her, that she had found her love in the faun, now banished forever, and not in what so healthily remained.

As Lon sank upon the couch and covered his eyes, he at last and finally realized that he had always known; for it was this very quality, from his first recognition of its import, that his unconscious mind had unceasingly and relentlessly betrayed him to destroy.

Beauty and the Bear

HOW GUNNER MAHONEY AND HIS MASCOT, THE INTRAC-
TABLE IMOGENE, HELPED PATTICAKE MURPHY
TO WIN THE BEAUTY CONTEST

By Grace Jones Morgan

THE big brown bear mascot of the revenue cutter Minor, now headed south after a season cruising the waters of Unalaska, had been under the special guardianship of Gunner Mahoney ever since he acquired her from a Siwash at Port Alberni, in exchange for a jack-knife. He had since regretted the loss of his knife.

Not that he did not like the bear. She had been an amusing playmate in her cub days; and, owing to his care, she was more fond of Gunner Mahoney than of any one else on board—which, however, was not so very fond.

Mahoney's time was nearly up. The end of this cruise would finish his career in the revenue service, unless he signed on again; and he had other plans. He had trained the bear with an idea of disposing of her to the movies. He hoped the Minor would put in at San Pedro, from which port he could take the bear to Hollywood, the Mecca of flappers, bear and otherwise.

Unfortunately, having been cast up at the age of three months in a ship's company of sixty-five men—mostly young men, full of original ideas of practical joking with a bear flapper—she had not acquired a proper sense of dignified bearing toward any one, least of all toward Gunner Mahoney.

He had inadvertently spoiled her the first day aboard. Finding that her fore-paw was injured, Mahoney sent a curse after the Siwash who had trapped her, and applied first aid to her paw and honey to her little red tongue—canned honey that he had begged from the steward. Since then a percentage of his wages went for canned honey, to soothe the bear's feelings,

which became more noticeably susceptible as she grew in height and girth and got in the way of minor injuries.

In time the bear understood that honey went with first aid and bandages. She cultivated opportunities for being bandaged and treated to honey. She hung around places where she was most likely to get a sly kick, or a rap on the nose, or a jab amidships from the hardier souls on board. She never failed to snarl at the master-at-arms, who retaliated with a kick that necessitated a bandage. She tormented Nipper, the fox terrier, until he snatched a tuft of her fur and left a spot which had to be bandaged.

She would promptly take her grievance to Gunner Mahoney and whine for bandages and honey. He tried to discourage the habit, but as a two-year-old—most of her two years had been spent under his spoiling—she had a way with her that got what she wanted. She could swing a paw and send him spinning, and she often did. Mahoney was a henpecked man by the time the Minor headed south and met winter gales which made the elderly cutter a tempest-tossed mote on the vast expanse of gray and troubled Pacific coastwise waters.

Mahoney had christened her Imogene. She had been called a good many other names, proper and improper, but in normal times she answered to "Imogene."

One night, while the gunner slept, the worst storm of the season blew up. When he came on deck, bearing a pail of scraps from the galley for Imogene's noonday mess, he had a view of a two-hundred-pound bruin flapper bewildered and enraged by a more strenuous tormenting than the teasing of the crew. She was on the

forward deck, and Mahoney saw her rear on her hind legs and slap at a wave crest that toppled over the bows and tossed spume in her face. Then the ship rose on an acute slant, and Imogene skidded on one hind foot in the wash of the wave on its way to the scuppers. She seemed to have landed on one eyebrow, and to be greatly vexed about it.

From the bridge, Captain Steele and the first mate were considering the rough weather that the Minor was making; but they took time from more serious contemplations to laugh at Imogene. The bear heard that laughter, and looked up. She reared upright, to get a better view. At that moment, the Minor dived down a hissing smother of foam-flecked green. Imogene, against her will, dived with the vessel and crashed into the port rail. She snarled and slapped at the rail, her claws ripping loose a sliver of wood.

With the rest of the crew on deck, Gunner Mahoney was enjoying Imogene's predicament, but he did not laugh aloud. He knew better than to show audible appreciation of any joke on Imogene when she displayed her fangs. She was slapping at the flying spume, which impaired her vision, and fighting her way through it to a nearer view of the officers on the bridge, who evidently enjoyed the way of a ship upon the sea—a way so disconcerting to landlubber bears.

The next minute Imogene dropped on all fours and scooted for the bridge approach, passing Gunner Mahoney without even a sniff at the pail of scraps. Before the gunner could intervene, she was on the bridge, standing upright, reaching for Captain Steele, who was nearest.

Gunner Mahoney looked worried. The captain, a stickler for diction, dignity, and discipline, was calling Imogene names not fit for a flapper's hearing.

"Listen to the old man!" came in a hoarse whisper from Able Seaman Morse, behind Mahoney. "He ain't mentioned Adam and Eve, but he's said the rest of the leading Bible characters, pat as anything. Listen, I ask you!"

Gunner Mahoney could not help hearing. Imogene had driven the captain and the mate to the bridge steps, and, with her paws on the wheelhouse, was making faces at the helmsman, who was protected from assault only by being inclosed. He had left one window open six inches for air, how-

ever, and through it Imogene reached for him, as if having the Minor and a Pacific storm on his mind were not enough responsibility for a man at the wheel.

"Get that bear out o' this!" he shrieked.

"Better go after her, Mahoney," advised Able Seaman Morse.

"Mahoney, get that infernal bear off the bridge!" roared the mate.

"Yes, sir," answered Gunner Mahoney, approaching cautiously.

But Imogene cared nothing for Mahoney. She struck out with a paw, and sent him sprawling. Then she leaned against the wheelhouse and grinned at the helmsman. Safe from her, he snatched a moment from the business of guiding the Minor through the watery onslaughts of the Pacific's rage, to grin back at her. Encouraged, Imogene cleared the bridge of the captain and the first officer.

On his way down the mate reached for a marlinespike, and hurled it. The weapon caught Imogene where no hero cares to display a battle wound—in the rear. She resented that blow. The sound of an iron pin slithering downstairs after its impact on a bear's after quarters, and her snarl of rage, greeted Mahoney as he scrambled to his feet.

During her training Imogene had never known anything worse than mild kicks and taps of fists. She looked about, aware that something was amiss, and found that a patch of fur had been lifted from her hide by the marlinespike. When Mahoney, in compliance with the mate's order, went up on the bridge, she met him with her little ears laid flat, her small eyes glittering, and her fine teeth displayed in a snarl.

Gunner Mahoney quailed.

"You old son of a sea swab!" he caressed. "Quit the mutiny, and I'll get honey. Honey!" he yelled below.

A jar of honey was passed up by Able Seaman Morse, who had assisted in teaching Imogene those cute little tricks for the sake of which she was forgiven serious offenses. Mahoney scooped a ladleful of the saccharine stuff. Approaching the angry bear on all fours, to escape the swing of her paws, he proffered it.

Imogene snarled at him. Mahoney swung the ladle and daubed honey on her snout. Pausing to lick her nostrils free enough to breathe, she got the honey taste, and her mind — a one-track mind — was turned from her desire to devour the man

at the wheel, who was tobacco-soaked and probably bitter-tasting, anyhow.

Imogene decided to sit down and enjoy the honey, but she had forgotten her injury. She was reminded of it when she lowered a patch of barked rear into a puddle of salt water. She shot into the air with a yelp of rage, and came down fighting. It took all Mahoney's skill as a marksman and range finder to get three ladlefuls of honey where it would do the most good and bring her to sanity.

Then Mahoney saw red.

"She's hurt! Her after bulkhead is barked!" he complained.

Plastering her features with honey, he drew Imogene off the bridge to the main deck, and aft. The officers side-stepped her and mounted the vacated bridge, but it was not a storm that they now chiefly considered. There was a bear on their minds. Gunner Mahoney knew it by the glances they bestowed below, and by their general attitude.

"You've got yourself disliked," he mentioned to Imogene.

Imogene did not care. Full of honey, she had time to think of her wound and of bandages. She backed up to Gunner Mahoney, knowing that only thus could he see her need. He saw it. He saw also that no ordinary bandage would suffice. He was considering, when Imogene backed again, shoving him with her, until his feet hit a coil of line and he went flat on his back. Imogene backed over him.

"Full speed ahead!" he howled into her fur-clad bosom.

Trained to obey orders, Imogene steamed ahead, but halted when Mahoney seized fistfuls of fur and braced his feet to put on brakes.

"First aid!" snickered the master-at-arms. "First aid to the after bulkhead! Better put a poultice of iodine on her. She might be infected."

"How'd you like to sit on a poultice of iodine, sir?" snapped Mahoney.

The third mate joined the consultation over the bear.

"It's your fault, Mahoney. You've spoiled her," was his advice.

"Yes, sir—but if I can have a sheet, sir, and some safety pins. She's hurt!"

A sheet was passed. Imogene waited as long as she cared to. Then she began to back again, nudging Mahoney with an expanse of bear as wide as a rain barrel, until

he was flattened against the rail as he folded the sheet and applied it.

Mahoney had not been the eldest of a large family for nothing. He made a job of pinning that sheet over a pad of cotton waste, and soon Imogene wore panties. She liked them. She was so proud of them that her ears came up and she swaggered forward, standing upright, to see if the pygmy enemies on the bridge observed her new garb.

"Avast there!" shouted Mahoney.

Imogene avasted on her hind legs. Then, as the ship rolled, she slid, her panties soaking up a barrel or two of the Pacific.

Mahoney proffered the neglected mess pail, which Imogene seized, and, hugging it to her heart, she buried her nose in dinner. Then a billow heaved the ship and Imogene rolled on her back, upending the pail and scattering scraps broadcast.

She winked at Captain Steele, who was passing, twisting the ends of his mustache in an effort to appear oblivious, while the bear rolled in dissolute abandon from port to starboard, leaving a shining wake on the wet deck, and licking bits from inside the pail, careless of the scraps that mixed with the scupper wash.

Mahoney's brow was furrowed with care.

"Port yer helm, Imogene!" he pleaded in desperation.

Imogene came upright, with the pail still clasped to her bosom. Just then a bigger wave than usual lifted the ship and sent the bear skidding across the deck, taking with her the third mate and the master-at-arms, to bring up against the after rail and execute a series of fancy backhanded flip-flaps into the sea.

II

GUNNER MAHONEY'S heart was heavy as he heard the signal to stop the Minor's engines. A boat was lowered. The two men came up, riding the billows and closely pursued by Imogene, who was no mean swimmer.

It was Tony, the recruit from El Paso, who saved Imogene. While the officers were being rescued, a line whirled in coils and straightened to a single noose, which settled over the bear and drew taut. Blinking and grinning at her fresh adventure, Imogene was dragged aboard and aft, down below, where Gunner Mahoney followed.

As best he could, he dodged the flying spray from her fur as she shook herself.

"You're a heller, disgracin' me that way!" he told her. "I'll have to smell you, all wet and everything, till you dry!"

He had plumped the honey jar on the locker, but Imogene knocked it into her lap, and, sitting with her back braced against the bulkhead, proceeded to gorge herself on honey.

Mahoney sat with his head between his fists, studying Imogene. He was thankful that his time was nearly up. He could leave the Minor in Oakland, and be through with the troublesome responsibility of the bear.

That hope perished when the master-at-arms came below.

"Mahoney! Captain's orders—get rid of the bear when we dock in Oakland."

"Yes, sir."

Mahoney swallowed hard. When Able Seaman Morse came below, he broached his trouble.

"Get rid of her—but how, and where? I meant to sell her to the movie people; but I can't hike her down to Hollywood."

"There's an amusement park in Oakland," mused Morse. "I've been there. I got skinned good playing litt'le feel games. I'd like to see them acquire Imogene. I'd be willin' to see them have her for keeps!"

"Do they buy bears?" asked Mahoney hopefully.

"Maybe they might. They got some bears. I've saw 'em."

They considered selling the bear until the thing seemed half accomplished, and in anticipation they were spending the money from the sale; so that when the Minor docked in Oakland, the thing was feasible. To enhance her value, they drilled Imogene constantly. The only difficulties to be considered were leave for the first day or so, and negotiations with the manager of the amusement park.

Off duty on Friday, and a free man on Monday, Gunner Mahoney rushed to the Eldorado Amusement Park. Inquiring his way through a whirl of noisy joys, he sought the manager in his office on the top floor of the dancing pavilion.

At the name of "Mr. P. Murphy," painted in black letters on the frosted glass of the office door, Mahoney took heart. He thought that any one with the name of Murphy might be expected to take an interest in a trained bear.

When he opened the door, his courage mounted further, by reason of the fact that

Mr. Murphy's daughter was perched on a corner of her father's desk, enjoying the reflection of her face in the mirror of an open vanity case. Mahoney sympathized with her pastime. It was a face that any one would enjoy looking at.

Mr. Murphy chewed on the end of a black cigar, which was otherwise pointed to high heaven.

Despite the fact that Mahoney's glance wandered, distracted by glimpses of Miss Murphy's face below the rim of a flower hat and her mirror, and of silk clad ankles depending from the folds of a near-seal cloak, the gunner pleaded well and to the point.

He knew she was Murphy's daughter. In Mahoney's estimation, it took a daughter to sit on a man's desk and pat powder on her nose through a business altercation. It later transpired that she had called in the family limousine for her to pass the time of waiting while he chewed cigars, she was needlessly assisting nature by the aid of a lip stick.

Gunner Mahoney spoke with one eye on her and the other on Mr. Murphy, at the imminent risk of crossing both orbs permanently. He was saved when Mr. Murphy's cigar lowered a point, and the great man remarked:

"You'll poison yerself wid that stuff, Pat. Ain't ye got a bit of gum to kape yer mouth busy wid?"

Miss Patricia changed the lip stick for a rouge pad.

"I think it would be nice to have another bear, papa," she said.

"What kind of a bear is it?" asked Mr. Murphy.

"A brown bear. She's two years old, sir, and trained."

"She!" Mr. Murphy leaped on the pronoun. "She! Can't consider it. I've got three he-bears now. If I got a she-bear, I'd be put to the expense of another den. I can't have my bears fightin' over nothin', and be buildin' new dens. We got the finest bears in captivity in California."

Mr. Murphy spoke like the posters on the billboards. Gunner Mahoney's heart sank.

"But we haven't got a trained bear, papa," argued Patricia. "Why couldn't we have her to do tricks, and charge admission? You know Monday is Beauty Contest Day, and I'll get a percentage for charity, and votes. I could have the

trained bear and this young man. What's your name?" she inquired.

Mahoney gave her his name and rating.

"Uh-uh! I could have Gunner Mahoney and his bear," she said. "You see, gunner, papa gives days, and on those days a percentage goes to charity. My friends help with the booths and get votes for beauty queens."

She spoke prettily. Gunner Mahoney felt cheered.

"I could have you and your bear," she added.

"Yes, ma'am," he agreed emphatically.

Could she have him and his bear? She certainly could! He had not talked to a girl in weeks—literally weeks; not to such a pretty girl as Patricia Murphy in his whole life. He began to take heart and lose it at the same time. Patricia gave him a new experience with a heart that had flinchingly served him steadily and unflinchingly for twenty-two years.

Mr. Murphy's cigar swerved four points, south by west.

"Put away that box o' junk, Pat. You'll do now. I can't see this bear stuff myself."

He could hardly be expected to, really—through powder and rouge and lip stick, not to mention near-seal and gossamer silk hose.

"But I want the bear. What can he do, Gunner Mahoney?"

"He? Who?" asked the gunner, glancing at Mr. Murphy, as if he wondered what a mere father could do against such a siren.

"Not papa—the bear."

"Oh! Oh, yes!" Mahoney swallowed a snicker at his own mistake. "Why, she can drill, and wrastle, and waltz, and stand on her head."

"Papa, I want that bear. There's a spare booth, and I'll have the entire profits and the biggest percentage. That will help me to get elected president next election, as well as beauty queen now."

Gunner Mahoney blinked. He thought of McKinley, Wilson, and Harding. He even remembered Garfield and Lincoln. He did not want Patricia Murphy to be in danger of martyrdom, but she looked nice enough to be anything. If they thought of having lady Presidents, he was for her.

Mr. Murphy's cigar dropped due south—a sign of surrender.

"Well, if you don't pester me to buy the bear when Pat gits through wid ye both—" he capitulated.

"Bring him to-morrow, and we'll get going," said Patricia.

"Monday is Beauty Contest Day," said her father.

"Well, if I can start making a percentage to-morrow, it will help," said his daughter.

"Sweet Christmas!" exclaimed Mr. Murphy, jabbing his cigar higher in his cheek. "Go ahead! I don't run this place no more. I'm goin' to resign!"

He stalked out of the door, leaving Gunner Mahoney flushed and jubilant at the three days' respite for Imogene before he would need to seek further disposal of her.

"Thanks, Miss Murphy," Mahoney said warmly.

"Call me Patticake. Everybody calls me Patticake," she volunteered.

"You're nice enough!" he ventured. "I'm on duty to-morrow, but I'll send Morse with Imogene. She don't perform so good for him, but I'll be here Sunday."

He was going to tell her that on Monday he would be a free citizen and a landlubber again; but Miss Patticake led him downstairs and to the gate, where Mr. Murphy sat behind the wheel of his car, eating a fresh cigar while he waited.

"Get in, and we'll drive you to the ship," said Patticake.

"Where'd you git that 'we' stuff?" snarled Mr. Murphy.

"I'd like to have you come aboard and look the ship over," invited the gunner.

Mr. Murphy did not accept the invitation. He was negotiating traffic just then. Never before had Mahoney driven in glass show cases beside future presidents of anything, and that was the shortest ride he ever remembered. His farewell to Patticake was cut short, because Mr. Murphy stepped on the throttle before it was half finished.

III

MAHONEY bore the comments of his shipmates with a disgusting swagger. He went below and stood before his mirror, currying his black hair, adjusting his scarf, admiring himself, and hoping he looked as good to the world as he did to himself just then. He had to admit that he was a fine, upstanding bulwark of the nation, and deserved his luck. He had not expected it, but it was welcome.

He put Imogene through her repertoire with fine abandon. He gave her a bath

with a holystone rub, and sluiced her down with a hose. Then he put her to dry, safe from contact with oil and bilge.

"I'm reckless enough to squander a bottle of lilac scent on you," he told her. "I wonder what's that perfume Patticake wears!"

Lighting a smoke, he stared through it at a vision easily recalled. Then he scowled as he remembered that Morse would see her on the morrow, and went about the business of getting leave for Sunday. Three days! Hadn't somebody written a book about that space of time? Gunner Mahoney hoped greatly.

In the morning he watched Imogene and Morse depart in a taxi. The able seaman was sitting on the bear's head, while she wagged a hind foot from out the taxi window.

"If she don't perform good for him, it'll be all the better for me when I'm on the job," Mahoney comforted himself, throwing out his chest.

He began to wonder if he could buy lip stick and rouge on the wages of a job likely to be the first available for an honorably discharged seaman in midwinter. He was recalled from high resolves when Morse returned with the news that Imogene did not like her new quarters, that Patticake Murphy was a doll baby, and that the dance floor at the Eldorado was glass—simply glass.

"Imogene sulked, so we danced. Oh, baby!" breathed Morse.

"Imogene's particular," observed Mahoney.

"She's particular hell," commented the master-at-arms, who had been interested in Imogene since he swam a Pacific storm at her side. "Mahoney, captain's request that you reconsider your determination to quit the service. He hopes you sign on again, because we're taking a special trip before we settle here for the winter."

"I don't see how I can now, sir, owing to Imogene being dismissed," replied Mahoney. "Not everybody has a bear on their hands, like me."

"Then I got her hove to," continued Morse, "snug as anything and full of kisses."

"Kisses! Who?" yelped Mahoney.

"Imogene—salt water taffy kisses. Miss Patticake likes to see her chaw 'em. They cost like heck, though!"

Able Seaman Morse was feeling the

change remaining from his wages with a far-away look in his eyes.

When Gunner Mahoney reached the Eldorado Amusement Park, in the morning, he found that Imogene had not stayed "hove to." She had weighed anchor, broken out of her booth, prowled about the iron fence which inclosed the den of captive bears, and talked bear lingo all night. Mahoney found her there, leaning her head against the bars, her little eyes ogling the bruins below, who were standing upright and serenading her in hoarse tones. The monkey cage, near by, was in an uproar. The hot dog man refused to open.

Mahoney coaxed her back to her booth with a plate of powdered sugar borrowed from the waffle man. Considering that she had her mind on the bear den, she went through her "stuff" very well, so that by noon the gunner had taken in a dollar and a half in dimes.

Patticake arrived, and laughed with him at Imogene's naïve flirtatiousness.

"She was full of fidgets from them kisses," explained Mahoney.

The hot dog man overheard, and snorted his indignation.

"That old bear fence is tumblin' on its pins. If them bears get out, there'll be murder and arson around here," he warned.

"Oh, those are old bears," drawled Patticake. Then she brightened. "Now this bear's got pep, somehow!"

"She's a flapper, and she was fed kisses—that's why," said the gunner, straightening his scarf and tilting his cap over one eye.

Patticake unsheathed a taffy kiss and fed the gunner. He was almost ready to do Imogene's "stuff" for her, to be fed kisses from Patticake's pretty fingers.

"Like 'em?"

"Anybody ought to—any kind of kisses," he retorted brilliantly.

"Watching her dance makes me want to," she suggested, giggling.

"Let's!" he invited her, remembering Morse.

Imogene rested while they danced and absorbed the day's profits in hot dogs, taffy, root beer, and waffles.

IV

NIGHT fell. A California moon shone through pepper and palm trees, and turned to sheeted silver the swimming pool in its

rim of white sand. While a band played "Tuck Me to Sleep," they rambled and took chances on wheel games at a dime a throw.

"In love, out o' luck," the gunner sighed, as he repeatedly lost.

"I've heard that before," said Patticake, wilting his budding romance.

"Not about me and Imogene you didn't," he returned in self-defense.

"Well, I dunno's I blame Imogene. You'd look pretty good under a fighting top, beside that big bear, gunner."

Mahoney's heart beat reveille on his wishbone. He laughed in sheer joyous abandon. It was something to be partner in a bear venture with the daughter of Mr. P. Murphy, and in company with a beauty like Patticake, who was not so money mad that she refused to let Mahoney amuse her.

"We've tried everything else, so let's go swimming—will you?"

Would he? He would. He knew how he looked in bathing trunks. He spent seventy-five cents for privileges and played in the moonlighted pool, with the band crooning and Patticake clinging and squealing. It was something to be introduced by the manager's daughter to other mermen and Nereids, and to gather, amid the flying spray of their gambols, that each gentle maiden was perfectly sure that she herself would not win a beauty prize, and that her friends were sure to be chosen.

"Honest, gunner, take a look, I ask you, and tell me who you think will get that prize!"

The gunner swore solemnly, and with heartfelt diplomacy, that not another girl stood a fighting chance beside Patticake. It made no difference at all, he declared, that they had spent the charity percentage which might have won votes for her, and nothing but a few hours' time stood between her and the coveted reward.

For this she rewarded him by lingering in the pool until it was otherwise empty, and the park crowds were exhibiting symptoms of satiation of park joys.

"I guess by the time I'm dolled up, gunner, papa will be waiting for me at the gate. He usually does; but if he don't happen to, we'll get a taxi to take me home."

Patticake dived and made for shore and the bath house, while Mahoney tried to remember how much small change was left in his pockets. Dressed, he waited until Patticake dried her crowning glory in a hot

air blast, donned her flower hat to preserve what was left of a permanent wave, and came to him with a bath robe over her bathing suit.

"You got my locker check," she said. "It was a good thing I hung my hat on the top of the locker, or my hair would have been the limit. Gunner, I'm hungry. Let's have waffles right now. It's late, and pretty near everybody's gone home. Anyway, I don't care. I guess my father runs this park, and if folks don't like the way I look, they don't have to. Come on! I got to eat when I'm hungry, or I'll be losing my dimples. You don't mind eating waffles with me in a bath robe, do you, gunner?"

"My queen can't do no wrong," he said.

The Minor's library held an assortment of fiction, into which the gunner delved at times for inspirational phraseology. Never did a situation call more poignantly for diction to hide his growing fear that he could not bear the expense of both waffles and a taxi, if her father should not happen to call for Patticake.

For financial reasons Mahoney insisted that one waffle was all he could eat. He watched Patticake absorbing four, and fingered the remaining coins in his pocket. He remembered the look in Morse's eyes as the able seaman recounted yesterday's junketing. He also remembered that it was late, that he was officially A. W. O. L., and that there was Imogene to get "hove to" for the night.

Torn between the need of warning Patticake that the waffles must be paid for and his disinclination to drag a future beauty queen from a man-sized repast, the gunner heard her order another waffle. He wondered that her dimples did not curve out, instead of in.

His wonder exploded, a moment later, when he saw the crowds headed for the outer gates suddenly divide as Imogene lumbered through, growling her disgust with a keeper who had neglected her all afternoon and had starved her, except for taffy kisses, which have little staying power. The bear had scented waffles. In her eagerness to reach them she knocked the gunner out of the way, batted Patticake's hat over the girl's eyes, and lunged at the waffle under tentative negotiation.

The waffle man retreated through a rear door of the booth. Patticake started a brief game of blind man's buff, until Ma-

honey caught her outstretched wrists. At that touch she flung her arms about his neck, shrieked in his ear, and danced on his toes.

"'S all right!" he gasped. "I waltz on 'em myself an' everything, but jist lemme get Imogene out o' this!"

Imogene, having devoured all the procurable waffles, headed for the hot dog booth, and shoved her nose into the hot dog man's face as he manipulated mustard from a bowl in his hand. With a wild shriek, he tossed loose mustard into his own eye, spattered the wall, and, leaping upward and backward with careless abandon, landed on the griddle amid a litter of sizzling frankfurters.

"Fire!" he shrieked, as he came to earth, his hands clutching the bosom of his trousers. "Fire! *Fire!*"

Somebody took the hint and jerked an alarm. Imogene, not caring for hot dogs, looked for Gunner Mahoney, who was vainly trying to disengage his neck from the clasp of Patticake's arms, and to twist the tickling of her shrieks from his ear with a forefinger. He was not aware of Imogene's advance until he heard the swish of her paw and landed in a bed of prize gladioli, which horticulturists came miles to see.

Knowing the method by which Imogene fought, he crept through the choice blooms, with the bear lumbering after him. The wild clangor of a fire buzzer and siren added to the confusion. He had been literally torn from the arms of Patticake, and Imogene craved a meeting with him. He darted into the crowd, which gave gangway as Imogene followed. He circled the park, looking for Patticake and watching out for the bear. Then he heard the fire apparatus arrive, and saw brave men tugging a hose over the fence and turning a stream on the hot dog wagon, which emitted smoke from burning sausages.

Mahoney paused for breath beside the monkey cage, and was held fast by fear as he saw Patticake's father come through the gate, evidently searching for some one. The gunner knew for whom Mr. Murphy searched.

Patticake, too, saw her father. She flashed into view just as the stream from the fire hose, which had put out the hot dog wagon and half drowned its proprietor, swerved and caught her from behind. Dressed for the water—she had lost hat

and bath robe in her hurry—Patticake was borne to her father's arms just as a powerful stream of water washed his foothold from under him and dropped him on his back, like a big turtle floating upside down in a strong current.

Patticake swam from off the parental bosom into the bed of gladioli. Considering his tonnage and displacement, Mr. Murphy made notable progress toward the gate. He turned as the fire stream swerved to another direction, caught one of his daughter's wrists, and then father and Patticake shot through the gate whirligig and into the automobile.

Gunner Mahoney sighed. Then he leaped, startled by a growl at his ear. Imogene was there, her little eyes glittering, her fangs on view.

"You old son of a sea swab!" he began, but Imogene was not to be flattered, and she swiped at him again.

Mahoney lunged forward blindly, and brought up against the iron fence of the bears' den, with Imogene a close second. Under the weight of the united impact the fence gave way; but the gunner had not climbed swaying masts for nothing. He leaped clear, headed for the high board fence surrounding the park, took it with a running jump, and perched on its upper edge. Looking back, he had a bird's-eye view of Imogene in one corner, staging one of the best tricks in her repertoire by standing on her head, while the biggest bear of the lot leered a white-fanged smile of welcome to the unexpected guest.

Mahoney's snarled soliloquy held pathos and self-pity, as well as sea curses directed at the oblivious Imogene. He suddenly felt disgusted with all flappers, bear and otherwise, with romance in particular, and with his luck in general. He sighed as he saw Imogene saunter about the den, turn up her snout at the smaller bears, and return to nip the ear of the big bruin with disgusting familiarity. She flipped a paw, which emboldened her new friend to rub shoulders. Then he paused in his rapidly growing acquaintance to cuff the younger bears who ventured near.

Mahoney remembered that he had been the cause of the ruined gladiolus bed, of washing the manager and his daughter out of their own park, and of allowing Imogene to indulge in this flirtation. Ashore, he faced a possibility of jail for disturbance of the peace. On board the *Minor*, he

fared a probability of punishment for being A. W. O. L. Without hesitancy he chose the latter.

Dropping to the street, he caught a car down Telegraph Avenue to the Estuary; and to the master-at-arms he exhibited a truculence most unusual. He was after hours, and was glad of it. He deliberately worked for punishment, and was sentenced accordingly. Under it, he smiled. At least he was saved from civic arrest and done with Imogene.

V

IN the morning the gunner was brought forth to face a red-faced and enraged Mr. Murphy, an equally red-faced but twinkling-eyed captain, and a red-faced and frankly grinning master-at-arms.

"Mahoney, you were under orders to dispose of the bear," began the inquisitory prelude. "It appears that you have violated a civic ordinance anent disturbing the peace of—"

"Disturbin' the peace!" broke in Mr. Murphy. "He put the whole park on the bum, him and his bear! Called out the fire department, ruined a thousand dollars' worth of choice flowers, and near drowned me darter and me—that's some of what he done! He'll come right now and take that blinkety blank bear out o' my den. Then I'll figger out a few of the charges I'll lay ag'in' him in court!"

Mahoney had driven in state in that luxurious car on another occasion. Now he returned in it to the park, in a state of humiliation which took all the honest pride from an upstanding bulwark of the nation. The master-at-arms, who went along to act as a sort of jailer and general chaperon, sat in the front seat with Mr. Murphy. Mahoney glowered at the backs of their heads, and pondered on the disgusting swagger that some fat necks display.

At the park, the crowd had gathered about the bathing pool, where a long arched walk had been curved over the water for the disporting loveliness of the competitors in the beauty contest.

Mahoney had momentarily forgotten the event of the morning. He saw the contestants over the heads of the crowd, and wondered for one moment how Patticake was showing form in that galaxy of fair buds; but his attention was kept from a close scrutiny because of the business of coaxing Imogene from the bear den.

The breach in the iron fence of the den had been barricaded with planks, which were removed.

"Mahoney, do your stuff," commanded the master-at-arms.

The gunner coaxed Imogene. He commanded her. He called her everything but Imogene, but she only grinned up at him and refused to leave her new quarters.

Then Mahoney thought of sugar and waffles. He explained his need and went after them, thereby getting a closer view of the beauty pageant, because the waffle wagon had moved so near the beach that he had to thread the crowd to reach it.

Returning, he offered Imogene hot waffles snowed under with sugar. She reached for the first one, and bolted it. Her attention was engaged. She stood up and mutely asked for more. Gunner Mahoney backed from the brink of the den, and held it where she must emerge to reach the delectable thing.

Imogene was not a deep thinker. She came out of the den and ate the waffle. Mahoney retreated with his third and last waffle, while the men applied a barricade that would bar her from her first romance.

But three waffles were as nothing to Imogene. She asked for more, nor would she follow an empty-handed Mahoney. When he tried to cajole and command, she heaved a paw, which he only missed stopping by a hairbreadth.

Then her nose lifted, sniffing the direction of the waffle scent. Catching it, she was away, the crowd parting before her. But the scattering throng irritated and confused her. The waffle purpose in her mind was a trifle blurred. She reached the brink of the bathing pool on the wrong side, bringing up the rear of a procession of beauty contestants decked in gorgeous bathing suits and bearing gaudy parasols and smiles.

The arrangement was to have the girls pass slowly over the arch, while selected judges made choice of the supreme pulchritude. Imogene hastened that march. She sniffed waffles just across the pool, and reached the arched runway, on which the last beauty in line had just stepped.

By pull and her father's influence, Patticake Murphy was last in the procession. She had not noticed Imogene, and was not in the least aware of anything unusual until a flutter of apprehension in the crowd caused the first beauty in line to pause at

the end of the arch and look back. The girl's poise was immediately spoiled.

"Look at the bear!" she screamed, and, flinging up her arms, dived into the mob beyond.

The line of beauties looked at the bear. Then they fled. Beauty in distress is appealing in a way, but not in the way of beauty judges.

Patticake, treading sweetly on her dainty pink toes, saw her rivals literally fade away. She had not caught the meaning of the stampede, and Imogene took her own time behind this dancing sprite, in no great hurry, since she could not pass Patticake owing to the slenderness of the walk.

In the curve of the arched runway Patticake posed and smiled. She twirled her parasol and blew kisses from her finger tips to the judges' stand. The crowd was awed to silence by the courage of this young and beautiful girl, standing there alone, with a big brown bear beside her. The picture was more than appealing. It was a knock-out and a burn-up.

Patticake proceeded to "do her stuff." She unwrapped a salt water taffy kiss, and held it in her dainty fingers, as she had seen marble beauties hold clusters of grapes. A gasp went up from the crowd, then a wild cheer. Imogene stood on her hind legs and took the candy from the girl's fingers.

"Hi, Pat! Look out the bear!" yelled her father, and thereby saved the day for Patticake.

For just one moment she was shocked out of her serenity. Then she recognized Imogene, and Patticake laughed—actually laughed at the flapper bear sitting on her haunches, grinning, and chewing taffy. On that arched runway, with sudden inspiration, Patticake put Imogene through her repertoire, rewarding her liberally with taffy kisses.

From shore, Gunner Mahoney, the master-at-arms, and Mr. Murphy watched, spellbound. It was a charming picture of beauty and the beast.

The crowd began to yell again. Cheers rent the air and stormed the ears of the judges. There was no doubt, no doubt in the world, that Patticake Murphy was queen of the Oakland Beauty Show.

Triumphantly she advanced over the runway, with Imogene following, walking on her hind legs, until they came to the foot of a stairway leading to the judges' stand. The venerable gathering of judges

backed into corners and handed the girl a scroll prepared for the occasion.

Patticake and Imogene had a clearing to themselves, though the crowd was braver than the judges when it saw that Imogene was gentle-mannered if she was treated well, and that she had proved herself no cannibal by refraining from a delicate dinner of unclad beauty.

Mahoney approached, pulled off his cap, and smiled at Patticake. He had inadvertently assisted her to the throne of the beauty queen. He asked no reward but a smile, and her influence with her father to save him from the awful things hanging over him.

"Guess I'll take Imogene, if you're through with her," he said.

"I guess you will not! Papa! Where's papa?"

Papa came and beamed on his daughter.

"You sure was a knock-out, Pat, that there bear and you," he said.

"Oh, papa, and I'll go to New York for the finals, and all the stores will send me marvelous things to wear!"

She threw her arms about Mr. Murphy's neck, and danced. Imogene tried to break up the family reunion in her search for more kisses. Her cold nose touched the ruddy folds of fat above Mr. Murphy's collar. She snorted in disgust as he trumpeted in her ear:

"Hellup! Hellup!"

Mahoney seized handfuls of Imogene and tugged.

"Come on, Imogene! We got to find quarters," he told her, but his heart was heavy and his voice practically toneless.

"You will not! Papa, he let that bear help me win the prize. You ought to keep her, because I want to have my pictures took with Imogene. There won't be another prize winner in the bunch with a bear beside her. I want Imogene!"

"Sure! Course you do! You'll have her, too. Mahoney, how much'll you take for that there bear, and promise not to let it occur again?"

Gunner Mahoney returned to the ship alone. The master-at-arms stayed to become acquainted with the prize beauty.

Before the gunner went to finish out time for being A. W. O. L., which was the only charge remaining against him, he divided the price of Imogene with Able Seaman Morse, and asked if he could sign on again for service for the next two years.

The Ear of Dionysius

IF PEGGY'S TRAVELING COMPANION WAS A PERFECT STRANGER,
WAS SHE TO ADDRESS HIM AS "PERFECT" OR
AS "STRANGER"?

By Margaret Busbee Shipp

"YOU'RE too late," said the man in the bath robe, who was standing on the adjoining balcony. "I know it sounds maddeningly superior to be told that by a perfect stranger; but I do wish you had come out earlier!"

Peggy hesitated for a perceptible moment before replying. Then she evidently decided to follow his lead, and to ignore the informality of their costumes and anything else that was unusual in this meeting. As guests at the hotel in Taormina, they were merely pilgrims in quest of the same beauty.

"The porter told me this was the best hour to see Etna free from clouds. Am I too late?" she asked in dismay.

"You're in time for that, if the clouds happen to lift. It was the sea that I was speaking of. It was as smooth and pink as a shell at sunrise." His voice was penitent, but all the dancing blue of the sea was in the stranger's eyes. "It was unpardonable in me to mention it, however, because one has a proper resentment against a person who boasts about seeing something that one has just missed. If I should tumble off the balcony at this moment, and not really break my neck, but knock off a pot of geraniums with my head, or some little maladroit thing like that, wouldn't there be a certain solace in it?"

She gave him a half smile without replying, and directed her attention wholly to the view, though in doing so she had to turn her back upon him. Instead of the ordinary pink or blue, her negligee was exactly the shade of a sage leaf—a delightful color which could be worn early on a December morning by only one type in the world—a girl with a white and rose skin, dark hair, and gray eyes.

"Clever arrangement of these rooms that overlook the sea—every little bedroom has a wee porch of its own," he paraphrased. "The village below, snuggled on the strip of level ground between the hills and the sea, is Giardini—by distance made more sweet, as you'll agree when you smell its garlic!"

Their balconies were only a few feet apart. Directly below was a garden gay with mimosas, geraniums, narcissus, roses. A waft of perfume came from the jasmine, starred with white flowers and pink with unopened buds. On the western horizon was the great pile of Etna, its summit veiled with clouds.

"Etna's a wily old volcano," suggested the man. "He knows he's engrossing your entire attention, so he won't show himself. If you'll devote yourself to that daisy tree, he'll come out of his sulks in short order."

"Daisy tree?" she repeated. "Why, truly it looks like it!"

To look in that particular direction she had to turn her face to him.

"It's unusual and interesting, and will repay a careful study," he replied soberly, though his eyes were laughing. "However, I didn't mean to thrust advice upon you, botanical or otherwise. It's annoying to be advised. On my way here I met a chap and told him I was going to Sicily on a hunting trip; whereupon he almost snatched me off the train, in his zeal to take me to Corsica to hunt wild boar. I actually had to run away from him!"

"I'm running away at this very minute," Peggy confessed.

He didn't ask a question, but looked intensely interested—which from time immemorial has proved the best way to extract information.

"You ought to look shocked," she chided. "I'm running away from my own dear cousin. Isn't it hideous of me? I don't like Naples, and she does. I was mad to see Sicily, and she wouldn't; and I'm a hardened criminal when it comes to running away!"

"Why should Mohammed be the only person who had a *hegira*?" he speculated.

She looked grateful for the suggestion.

"All my life I've done it," she admitted. "It's my earliest recollection. There came a day when my nurse wasn't looking, and I took to the open road. To this hour I recall the thrill of it, for the grass was cool against my small, fat legs, and it wasn't clipped off short, like the grass I had known. There were spider webs on tall weeds, and presently there was the sea. Having discovered it all for myself, I went to sleep against a rock, and later on was found by my distracted parents, nurse, nursery governess, Cousin Sophia, and a few others. If they had spanked me good and hard, it might have nipped my spirit of truancy; but as I was an only child, they took me home with rejoicing and gave me ice cream."

The stranger debated the matter.

"If you had been spanked then, you wouldn't be running away now. There are always compensations to the true philosopher. This time—was it to find new spider webs? Look, you have Etna!"

He had purposely engaged her attention as the clouds lifted. When she turned and saw the volcano clear, she caught her breath in sheer rapture.

The slope of the mountain was so gradual that there was not a sharp line in the gentle, unbroken ascent. The cloud-encircled base melted into the shore, and the shore into the sea—all toned in the same soft, indeterminate blues. The sun shone on the radiant crown of snow, dazzling and whitely beautiful.

"It seems more an aspiration than a mountain!" said Peggy.

Her eyes were full of tears. They watched it in silence until presently a wraithlike cloud of smoke rested over the crater.

From Peggy's room a maid appeared with a breakfast tray, and with the injured expression of a person whose knocking has been unheeded.

"You're amazingly energetic," approved the stranger. "Probably no other tourist

in Sicily is having coffee at such an ambitious hour."

"I've engaged a donkey at nine. I'm going to climb—"

She stopped short, remembering one did not tell perfect strangers of one's plans for the morning.

"Going to climb?" he repeated genially. "Bearing a banner with a strange device?"

II

As she ate her *petit déjeuner* in her room, Peggy's thoughts were rather jumbled. Etna was forgotten—Etna that she had come so far to see!

At the appointed hour Domenico arrived with his sturdy little donkey. Peggy jogged through the quaint streets, and presently dismounted at the entrance to the ancient Greek theater.

She had a reprehensible way of seeing ruins. Avoiding guides as pestilential and facts as cumbersome, she let her fancy run riot. Presently the seats in the theater were no longer broken and grass-grown, nor was the green lizard sunning himself where ancient rulers sat. A throng began to pour in, filling the seats, crowding in everywhere. The orchestra was no longer a sunken place with broken columns, but there were strange, poignant music, soft laughter, and the murmur of many voices. Vague actors flitted across the stage.

Peggy bent forward, as if to see them better, and the vision lifted like a mirage. Three tourists passed by, with a guide who was explaining:

"Dees teatro was builded in de time of de—"

She hurried away, lest any robust fact should rend the gossamer texture of her dream. Remounting, she began the climb to Mola, the village above Taormina. Domenico assured her repeatedly:

"Domenico veree strong. Domenico veree good guide. Domenico have veree good donkey!"

As she turned a bend in the path, she saw the stranger. He greeted her gayly, and fell into step beside her as the donkey climbed stoutly upward.

"You and I could probably find a dozen friends in common, if we tried," he began pleasantly.

She looked surprised, but said nothing.

"Agreeable people like ourselves have somewhere or other encountered the same persons; but what a waste of time for two

intelligent beings to put their efforts into discovering whether they are acquainted with Mr. Doe of Minneapolis or Mrs. Roe of Savannah! Then, probably, one thinks Doe is a charmer, the other thinks he's a horse thief, and the mutual acquaintance has thrown sand into the machinery from the very beginning. So shall we start with a clean slate, and not struggle for anybody's autograph on it? I'm the perfect stranger and you're the lady paramount—can't we let it go at that?"

She considered it for a moment, and then asked with a hint of demure malice:

"Must I call you by your first name, Perfect?"

"Only if you find it underestimates my virtues," he returned modestly. "Otherwise you might say 'stranger,' gracious lady."

The discussion came to an abrupt end, because the way led up irregular steps cut in the rock.

"Don't you know that a donkey has four legs, and there isn't room here for more than two? Let me get off, please!" she demanded of the guide.

But as Domenico's English vocabulary was confined to the list of his own accomplishments, he gave the donkey a whack, and the little beast obediently took the steep incline at a slightly accelerated pace.

"Avanti!"—this to the donkey.

"Coraggio!"—this to Peggy.

"Hop-là!"—this to them both, as the steps were surmounted.

The two Americans were laughing like the very spirit of youth.

"Don't you think Etna seems nearer here?" asked Peggy presently. "Look at those villages at the base, and the straggling houses farther up the slope of the volcano, toward the crater, like daring children venturing to go a little nearer to the bogey man!"

They paused before a simple monument with a crowning gold star. Remote as it seemed, the tiny village on the mountain top in Sicily was yet a part of the great world, and had paid the bitter toll for civilization, for the monument bore the names of its eighteen dead sons:

CADUTI IN GUERRA, 1915-1918

Domenico led the way to the home of a villager where one could buy almonds, dried figs, and native wines. With an ingratiating smile he produced a worn recom-

mendation on which an American had written:

If the tourists treat Domenico to wine, he will sing for them.

Perhaps the American was a practical joker, or perhaps his favorite musical performance was whistling through a comb. In any case, the stranger fell into the trap. He treated the guide to a bottle of red wine, and when they began the descent, Domenico commenced to sing, in a voice like a Sicilian cart wheel in need of axle grease.

They besought him to stop. They made desperate pantomimes that they had received their money's worth and far, far more. Domenico assured them in Sicilian that he was not in the least fatigued, and he continued to sing cheerfully until they were back at the hotel again.

"He really understands your Italian, I'm sure," said Peggy. "Please tell him that it is a good donkey, and that I'd take it again, but that I'm leaving Taormina this afternoon."

The stranger's brow suddenly clouded.

"Leaving this afternoon?"

Her color was bright.

"There's Cousin Sophia waiting for me in Naples. I left her a note telling her that I had deserted her only for a few days, and that one really should see Syracuse."

"May I be of any service to you at the station?" he inquired stiffly. It was plain that he inferred she was running away from him this time. "I shall be leaving for Messina, in the opposite direction, but my train passes later."

When they went to the railroad station at Giardini, they found Peggy's train posted as being two hours late. As seen from the hills above, Giardini was a picturesque village nestled against the sea, but at closer range dirt and the reek of garlic destroyed all its charm.

"Would you care to take a drive to pass the time while waiting for the train?" inquired the stranger, his manner formally courteous.

"That would be very nice," Peggy agreed; "especially if we might drive to Isola Bella, which I haven't had time to see."

They drove along a lovely way with the afternoon light on an amethystine sea, but the companionship of the morning was broken like a spell.

Suddenly from the valley below there came a shrill whistle.

"Can that possibly be your train?" exclaimed the man, in dismay. "Why, it is still an hour before it was reported due!"

Peggy was vexed and embarrassed. She had surrendered her room to a guest who was to move in at once. To return to the hotel now meant annoying explanations about missing a train which was an hour late.

When they reached the station again, the official tranquilly explained that the train had made up an hour, that there was no later train to Syracuse, but at nine o'clock a local would pass for Catania, where one might spend the night and go on to Syracuse at six the following morning.

"That's what I shall do," said Peggy, with relief.

"Then I shall go with you," replied the stranger quietly. "I must at least see that you are comfortably settled at a hotel in Catania, though I advise you to return to Taormina. I regret inexpressibly that you should be subjected to all this inconvenience through my fault."

When the train came, he found a seat for Peggy, arranged her bags, and left her. He held to his determination not to intrude upon her, and she did not see him again until she reached Catania.

There they took a carriage, and the stranger directed the driver to go to the best hotel. Peggy made an overture of friendliness:

"I don't know what I should have done alone, stranger. They don't speak French, and I don't speak Italian. I couldn't even have directed him to a hotel. It's childish to act on the impulse of the moment in the way I do!"

This was emphasized to her when they reached the hotel and found it full. At the next hotel they tried, the porter said he could give the *signor* a bed in a room with two others, but had no place for the *signora*. The stranger paid in advance for his accommodation, and said he would return later. The third hotel had a sign outside stating there was no more room.

"They must be holding the Republican Convention in Catania this year," remarked the stranger, his tone determinedly cheerful.

He had a talk with the driver, and repeated to Peggy:

"This man says there are no other good

hotels here, that in Catania the hotels drop from the first-class ones — God save the mark! — which we have seen, to the fourth-class ones, and that he knows of no other suitable place for you to pass the night."

"Could I take a train back to Messina, and give up Syracuse?"

He put the question to the driver, and interpreted:

"The man says there are no trains in any direction until morning. The station is now locked up until the early train to Syracuse."

"That cuts out the station as a place to sleep," said Peggy; "and it's cold for a public park, even if there is one."

"It eliminates everything but those fourth-class hotels, and after our glimpse of the best ones I feel utterly disgusted that I've put you to all this discomfort through that drive!"

"Please don't be sorry, stranger. Nobody really puts another person into difficulties. I put myself there by my own temperament, and my sins are on my own head."

Her generosity seemed to clear up matters, and they regained the freer companionship of the morning, even though driving through dark, narrow streets with nowhere to go, at an hour which had reached midnight.

By this time the driver was impatient to be paid off. He suggested that they might find a room at a lodging place he knew, the Red Elephant.

"The Red Elephant must have belonged to a prehistoric age and had the legs of a giraffe," suggested the stranger.

For the ground floor was occupied by mean shops and the Elephant proper began only after one had mounted a rickety flight of stairs. The proprietress was a Frenchwoman, with fat bare feet thrust into red bedroom slippers. She had no place but her salon — presumably dignified by that name because it contained a battered upright piano; but she could fix a place there for *monsieur* and *madame*. She shrugged her shoulders when told that only a place for *madame* was required. The woman waked up her Sicilian husband, and they brought in a more or less unstable cot and propped it up.

Peggy asked for the key, but the woman explained that the adjoining room was that of a lodger who had no entrance to his room save through the salon, so the door

could not be locked. The lodger was a lawyer—"un avocat bien sérieux." It would be an advantage to *madame* to have a room next to that of so serious a gentleman, since unfortunately *monsieur* could not remain. She waddled sleepily away.

Peggy was trembling, partly from fatigue and partly from the queer strain of the situation. The stranger's blue eyes met hers reassuringly.

"*Coraggio!*" he softly quoted Domenico's admonition to courage.

Pushing with all his strength, he rolled the old piano across the door, blocking it completely.

"The serious lawyer is penned up until I move this back in the morning. Good night, and go to sleep. I've ordered coffee for you at half past five, and I'll see that you get your train this time. Good night!"

She put out an unsteady hand.

"Good night, Perfect!"

III

THE room seemed appallingly lonely after the perfect stranger had closed the door. Peggy lay down and fell into the deep sleep of fatigue.

Perhaps two hours passed before she was awakened by a creaking noise. She thought it came from the lawyer's room, and she sat bolt upright, terrified. Then she realized that it came from outside the door that opened into the hall. She must know what menace lurked there!

Opening the door noiselessly, she saw the stranger sitting there, fast asleep, his chair tilted backward. He looked singularly young and boyish as he sat there on guard, his hair disarrayed on his forehead. In fact, he looked irresistibly boyish, and Peggy was a person who followed her own capricious impulses. She bent over him for a moment, hardly a breath of time, and then slipped back into her own room.

The stranger must have dreamed of agreeable things, for his hand strayed softly to his forehead.

He did not mention his vigil to her. It was as if he had come at that moment to take her to the train when he knocked at her door the next morning. The Frenchwoman brought them a tray with coffee, dark bread, and honey.

The early train was used principally by laborers going to Syracuse for their day's work, so the two had a first-class compartment to themselves. Peggy slept through

a tranquil hour, and then awoke with the eagerness of a child to see new sights. They were passing through miles of lemon groves, where the gatherers were piling the fruit in pyramids under the trees.

"I didn't know there were so many lemons in the world as I've seen since I left Palermo. There ought to be a lemon pie for everybody on earth!"

"Shall I get you one?" he offered.

"Thanks, I'll take a jolly painted Sicilian cart, instead; and I shan't be satisfied unless my donkey has the very longest feather between his ears of any donkey on the island!"

"I'll tell you what I don't want," said the stranger, looking out of the window on his side. "It's a Sicilian laundress. Look at that group drying clothes on a cactus hedge, and think of the poor kiddies who wear them later! It makes me—er—itch with indignation to think of it!"

"You're the most unsentimental person!" she laughed. "I'm looking at the sea—just the shade of the blue ribbons on my first little party frock. There's a sail-boat with white wings, and there are gay little boats on the beach painted in reds and yellows, and there's purple iris peeping between the rocks."

"Out of my window," he rejoined meekly, "I see a sturdy cabbage patch elbowing its way among its aristocratic neighbors, the artichokes."

"Are the artichokes ripe? If we could only have some for lunch!"

"Your fervor reminds me of a poem I have composed since coming to Italy:

"Yankee Doodle went to town
Upon a little pony,
Stuck a feather in his hat
And called it beans, potatoes, corn, rice,
carrots, peas, turnips, tomatoes, any old
thing you please *except* macaroni."

"I suppose it's a matter of self-protection," he continued. "Their land would be overrun with foreigners if it weren't for that one barrier. It's only the daily service of spaghetti and macaroni that keeps Italy for the Italians. We seem to be reaching Syracuse, lady paramount."

"Already?" The word escaped Peggy's lips involuntarily.

They had another breakfast out on the sunny terrace of the hotel, and then engaged a carriage for the day.

They visited the catacombs of San Giovanni, where a barefooted priest conduct-

ed them through the vast corridors by the light of a lamp.

"I don't like to look at remains, even of early Christians," whispered the stranger. "They bear such a painful resemblance to herring roe!"

Peggy snubbed him by paying all her attention to the gentle guide, who led them into the subterranean church of San Marziano, before the altar where St. Paul was said to have preached when he tarried three days at Syracuse.

"I wish I could conjure up that picture," said the girl, her eyes dreamy and sweet; "but I'll always be glad we came."

Then they drove to the Fountain of Arethus, where the papyrus grew thick and orange lantana made a gay background against the stone wall.

"The papyrus is looking a bit bedraggled," acknowledged the stranger; "but with such a flavor of antiquity about it, who would carp at trifles?"

Peggy did not answer. She was looking at the smooth, fair harbor, which long ago had known strange crafts—Greek, Carthaginian, Saracen. Where a few tranquil ships were now at anchor, once there had been fleets of triremes.

She came back to the present with a start, and smiled at the comprehension of her mood which she read in her companion's eyes.

"We might save the Greek theater and the Roman theater for this afternoon," she suggested; "but I do yearn to see the Ear of Dionysius now."

"Never heard of it," the man confessed. "In fact, I should have guessed he had two of 'em."

"It's an echo," she explained. She took sightseeing far more ardently than he did. "The Latomia del Paradiso is a gigantic quarry, where that old tyrant Dionysius kept tens of thousands of slaves at work. The echo is so marvelous that one could hear from above every word that was said; and if any one conspired against him, the poor wretch was put to death."

Festooning vines hung over the sides of the deserted quarry, and the toiling thousands had given place to a few old men making twine by hand.

A guide conducted them to the entrance of the strange fissure in the rock which makes the echo. The steep sides of the cliffs were curiously curved, like the twisting of a colossal ear. The Italian sighed,

and the sigh came back like a sad little breath from nowhere. He took a letter from his pocket and tore it slowly. The tearing sound echoed sibilantly, and seemed to go on and on after it had slipped away from actual hearing.

When he commenced to sing, Peggy looked mutely imploring. The stranger understood.

"You want to try this echo for yourself, and that fellow insists on doing all the talking?"

He explained in his friendly way that the *signorina* was too shy to try the echo with any one present. If the guide would have the kindness to wait just outside the entrance? A tip soothed Sebastiano's *amour propre*, and he withdrew, to meditate somberly on his own troubles; for he had quarreled with his wife that morning because she had insisted upon his buying a certain silk scarf, though she knew how little money he made as custodian of the *latomia*, and how few tourists there were this season.

In the meantime Peggy was finding the echo a fascinating plaything. She called her mother and her friends for the joy of hearing their beloved names, and her own voice came back to her, a shade more wistful. She began to hum a bar of song—and stopped short, for her breath was coming fast, and somehow she could no longer meet the masterful gaze of the stranger's blue eyes.

"Call my name now, won't you? Am I the only person you refuse to introduce to Dionysius?"

"Perfect strange—"

She broke off, and the echo softly mocked:

"Strange!"

"I know I've been a little fool," her voice came half sobbingly.

"Little fool!" the echo sobbed, but gently.

Peggy turned defiantly. Her voice rang clear and proud:

"Dionysius, the perfect stranger is my own dear lover!"

"Lover!" the echo wondered, and then promptly had to register another sound, as the stranger gathered Peggy in his arms and kissed her.

"I simply can't stand it!" she said five minutes later, rosy and confused. "Every time you kiss me, Kirk, that echo just *carries on so* about it!"

They went out again into the sunshine, and Kirk gave the guide the most astonishing *pourboire* of his days.

Presto, out of the skies dropped money for the scarf! But Sebastiano would not give it to his wife in this one amazing note, for she would not think of it as a sacrifice. No—he would count out the necessary sum from their small hoard, in *centesimi*, in dirty notes for one and two *lire*. She would fall upon his neck and caress him, she would abuse herself picturesquely. There was no harm in indulging a wife, but Sebastiano knew that the wise man must do it with discretion.

IV

As they drove back to the hotel, there was much to tell and ask. Kirk began with the latest puzzle:

"Why did you run away from me again, from Taormina, when I had come so far to find you? That hurt!"

"I had traveled from Palermo with two nice Englishwomen, and when I told them I was absolutely alone in Sicily, they asked me to join them. For you to have appeared the very first morning might have created a scandal in a small hotel like that; so I thought it wiser to take flight, and I didn't dream you weren't coming with me until you spoke so haughtily of going to Messina." Her hand clung closer to his. "Dearest, it was horrible in me to run away the very day after our engagement was announced, and I've been every bit as unhappy as I deserved to be!"

"We've lost three months together, darling. That sobers me. It's the cold fact that's the result of hot tempers."

The outrageous part of their quarrel was that it dated from the night when Peggy's mother announced their engagement at a dinner for their intimate friends.

Their intimate friends had "always known it would happen"—their wonderful surprise! By the time a dozen or more people had told Peggy that Kirk and she were "absolutely *made* for each other," Peggy was in a contrary mood, and inclined to be argumentative about it.

Then, at the end of the evening, one of the girls touched off the smoldering spark:

"Peg, do you remember how you used to tell us that you were going to marry a playwright?"

The friend had unwittingly probed the one sensitive spot in Peggy's happiness.

"Oh, I don't suppose Kirk will be content to be a business man all his life," Peggy retorted. "I can understand how a woman could be interested in her husband's books, plays, editorials, cartoons, briefs, or patients, but not in his ability to sell cars!"

The sparkle in Kirk's eyes changed swiftly from laughter to danger signals. As soon as the last guest had gone, the storm broke. He said she knew that his uncle was a bachelor and he the only nephew. It was a splendid opportunity for a man of his years to have a chance to succeed to a prosperous business with twenty years of square dealing behind it. He was jolly well proud to be a partner in the firm, and he would not stand a supercilious attitude toward his day's work in the woman who was to be his wife.

Peggy flared up in her turn. Fortunately she was not his wife yet; and as he considered her supercilious, and she considered him dictatorial, it would be better for them to be perfect strangers in the future.

Whereupon Kirk swore, and violently, that he would accept her wish in the matter just as long as it was her wish.

Next morning Peggy had a letter from Cousin Sophia, lamenting that the girl was not going with her to Italy. She telegraphed that she would join her cousin in New York. She left at noon, without a word to Kirk.

Her mother had been troubled and protesting. It was arrogant Cousin Sophia who brought Peggy to her senses. The more violently Cousin Sophia abused Kirk, the more vehemently Peggy defended him.

Then one morning Peggy's mother showed Kirk—a hurt, stubborn Kirk, who nevertheless haunted her house—a letter from her kinswoman:

I can no longer understand Peggy. When we were over here before, she haunted picture galleries; now she thinks only of automobiles. It's an obsession. The child never had a commercial instinct before her engagement to that young man, but he seems to have infected her with the virus of the market place!

Kirk caught a Mediterranean liner and went directly to Naples, to learn of Peggy's flight the day before.

"Cousin Sophia and I actually hit it off," he told Peggy amusedly. "She wasn't giving this Sicilian escapade any cheers, and she advised me to keep a tight rein on you after we were married."

"I ran away because she insisted upon

calling you 'dictatorial,' just because she heard me say it, and I told her I wouldn't stand it."

Kirk shouted with laughter.

"I find I have so much use for a dash of temper in the automobile business that I've positively none left for home consumption. The main thing is that we've both learned how we love and need each other. I can't live without you, Peggy, and that's flat!"

Perhaps the word made her think of tires, for she said excitedly:

"Oh, dearest, truly I've found the most adorable thing that every woman needs in her car to—"

Alas for Syracuse, which has dwindled by a million inhabitants in the course of the centuries! Still, it's an ill wind that blows nobody good, for there were fewer observers when the perfect stranger impetuously kissed the lady paramount again!

The Turn of a Card

A STORY OF POKER PLAYERS' LUCK, PROVING THAT FATE IS THE MASTER GAMBLER OF ALL

By William H. Hamby

QUEER thing, the turn of luck! It seems sometimes as if Fate stands back in the half shadows, and, with a sardonic smile on her inscrutable face, gambles with human lives for her own amusement.

We had gone down across the line into Mexico, ostensibly to hunt, but actually to play poker. "Ace hunters," the wit of the crowd dubbed us.

There were seven in the car, and not a man in the bunch a gambler, but not a man in the bunch who would not gamble. All were business or professional men who hankered for a few days where they would not have to go to the office at eight o'clock and home again at six; where they could not be reached by telephone or Western Union messengers; where, in short, they could play poker as long as they liked, interrupted only by the bottle, and not by the clock.

It was a hundred-mile drive—eighty miles of it beyond the bounds of prohibition; and the last seventy of the eighty were somewhat hilarious. The clubhouse—a sufficiently primitive affair—stood at the foot of the mountains, only a few hundred yards from the sea. It was a wild strip of coast, uninhabited for many miles; and as the hunting season had not opened, we had the place entirely to ourselves, save for the

one attendant—a Mexican who lived in a shack down by the spring half a mile south, and who looked after the club property during the closed season.

Two of the fellows went for the attendant, to get him to open up the clubhouse, while the rest began to unpack the load—grips of personal belongings, and boxes of food, and bottles of antiprohibition stuff garnered at the last Mexican village we had passed.

That finished, I wandered out down to the edge of the steep bluff overlooking the sea. Two hundred feet below, the long, easy waves were splashing against the rocks. The sun, its brilliance softened by haze into the mildness of a big red moon, was just slipping down behind the western horizon.

To me there is something beyond loneliness in a sea sunset. It brings a feeling of utter detachment, as if all the strands of the anchor rope of reality had unraveled, and left me a lost atom in a formless, meaningless universe.

The somber, barren mountains that rose up darkly to the east; the low, crude, rambling building of the hunting lodge, with its air of utter desolation; the rude Mexican shack at the foot of the slope to the south, where a blue curl of smoke gave the only

sign of life on the coast; the wide expanse of water; the long, whitish clouds that made blurred streaks across the sky—the whole picture somehow got into me like a cold chill creeping into my bones, and I wished I had been a thousand miles from such a gloomy spot.

But the feeling was quite quickly dispelled. The fellows had returned with the key, the caretaker had unlocked the heavy front door, and we were piling our stuff inside as he opened the windows.

Then the Mexican went back down to the spring by his house, and brought a pail of water. We made coffee and spread supper from our hampers, and opened bottles. We did not take time to cook anything, for we were eager to get to the main business of the evening—a rousing poker game.

Among the seven who sat down at that round table there was a wide diversity of temperament, but all were good sports.

Bart Hampton, who sat directly opposite me, was a big, burly chap with a thick neck and a large head. He could drink enormously, and, although his legs might get dizzy, his head never did.

Jim Shaw, who sat at Bart's left, was a tall, slender man, gray at the temples, with a refined face and a lovable smile. When sober, he was exceedingly gentle and refined; when drunk, he was astonishingly profane and obscene, but, even then, always good-humored.

Larry Davis came next—a short, alert, wiry chap who would gamble his soul for the fun of it, but would starve rather than take a nickel that had not been fairly won.

I came next, and to my left was Denny Cordovan, a tall Irishman who cursed his cards fluently when the hands were bad, but who took his knocks standing up.

After him came the judge, who, when sober, could render decisions that would weigh a hair on the scales of justice; but when drunk he was as fatuous as a soda fountain clerk talking mush to a flapper.

Beyond the judge sat Steve Johns—tall, with dark hair and blue eyes, long, smooth hands, a fine, clear-cut nose, and a wide, friendly mouth. He was a wag, a wit, a comedian when drunk, but as dourly temperamental as an opera singer when half sober. He had traveled over most of the world, and spoke half a dozen languages. At times he had the courtliest manners, and again he could turn loose the most ribald jokes and the most blasphemous talk.

Steve was an enigma to me—to all of us, perhaps. We knew less about him than about any of the rest. We knew, for instance, that he would play for any stakes, and would lose like a thoroughbred; but we did not know whether he could afford it or not. He was the one man among us without any definite business or occupation. It was understood that he dealt in bonds. He had, so far as we knew, no family ties; but all of us implicitly trusted him to be a gambling gentleman, and not a gentleman gambler.

Perhaps because he piqued my curiosity, I confess to taking a greater interest in him than in any of the rest. I had never known a man with whom I would rather spend an evening in a camp or on the trail than with Steve Johns. He had been playing in rather hard luck of late, and I hoped that the cards would run his way to-night.

II

THE doors were shut, a fire crackled in the fireplace, the lights glowed over the table. Cigars and cigarettes were going, and talk—rough man talk—went round. Bart Hampton tore the wrapper from a new pack of cards, and began to deal them face up—the man getting the first jack winning the deal.

It was only eight o'clock, our stomachs were full, and a whole night and a day were ahead of us. I do not wonder that our spirits leaped prankishly; but I do wonder if Fate, the head gambler of all, grinned as he shuffled his own deck for a draw none of us suspected.

The first jack fell to Steve Johns, and I was glad, for I thought it a sign that his luck had changed.

He dealt, Hampton passed, and Shaw opened with five red chips. Larry Davis stayed. I threw down. Cordovan raised it five.

It was up to Steve Johns. He hesitated for a second, then raised again. The pot was raised three times before the draw.

Shaw drew one, Larry Davis three, and Cordovan two. Johns stood pat. Shaw checked the bet, but Davis bet five, and Cordovan threw down. Johns raised ten. Davis dropped out, and it was between Shaw and Johns. They raised back and forth until more than a hundred dollars was in the pot. Then Shaw called. Steve had a heart flush, ace high, but Shaw had made a full house.

Steve Johns laughed, pushed the chips over to the winner, and lighted a cigarette.

Well, that was only the beginning of the most diabolical streak of luck I ever saw strike a man in one evening. It was luck of the most accursed kind to a poker player—good hands that would be just topped. Once Johns had a pat full house—full on aces—and bet the pot up to two hundred dollars, only to find that the judge had held two deuces and had drawn two more.

Again, Johns stayed on a pair of aces and drew two more—seemingly a hand safe for a million dollars; but I stayed on ten, jack, queen, and king of clubs, and drew the nine of clubs to make a straight flush.

It being a gentleman's game, the banker merely kept track of the chips we bought, the settlement to be made at the end of the game. At eleven o'clock, when Steve Johns bought his fifth stack of chips—a hundred dollars' worth in each stack—I felt, without any special reason, that he was not going to be able to pay for them. I don't know how I got that impression, for he was still debonair, laughed easily at his hard luck, and smoked in perfect coolness; but there was something—a movement of the hand, a glance of the eye, a shade of bravado in his next bet—which suggested to me that the fellow was broke, and that his losses to-night would not be paid.

I hoped more than ever that luck would break right for him before morning, for he was a man to whom a thing like that would be intolerable.

At half past twelve, when bad luck still dogged him, Johns began to grow unmistakably nervous. He was in eight hundred dollars now. The other men, though most of them had been drinking pretty heavily, noticed that his hands shook as he dealt, and that when he lost he threw the cards down with poorly restrained violence.

We had agreed to stop for a midnight lunch after the next hand. The dealer, Bart Hampton, called for everybody to ante five dollars. The cards were dealt, and every one put up his money. I opened for ten dollars, and it was raised three times before it got around to me. I raised once more, but all seven players stayed; and although there were three more raises, no one dropped out. When it finally came to the draw, there was more than six hundred dollars in the pot.

Hampton, the dealer, had a quirky streak when about half shot.

"Hold on!" He raised his hand. "Each of you fellows discard, and throw your cards in the middle."

We obeyed.

"Now," he said, "I'm going to deal you your cards; but leave them face down until we all take a drink to the lucky man. If we drink before we look, we can all drink to ourselves!"

I had three aces, and called for two cards. I'd have given a good deal to know what those two were that Hampton threw sprawling, face down, on top of mine; but I did not even peep. Neither did any one else.

I noticed closely what all the rest drew—Shaw one, Larry Davis four, Cordovan two, the judge three, Steve Johns one, and the dealer two.

Then we got up to fill our glasses and drink to the lucky man.

When I look back on that night and think of the series of little things, any one of which might have changed destiny, I can't rid myself of that grim notion that Fate stood in the shadows, dealing out the luck himself.

Hampton had got a bottle of gin a few minutes before. It was so strong that everybody wanted it weakened. He picked up the pitcher of water. His head was clear, but his legs were not steady. He lurched and dropped the pitcher with a crash, and the water ran out on the floor.

I went to the bucket. It was empty. They all insisted that they could not drink the gin without water, and that anyway we must have water for coffee.

"Well, let's play out the hand, and then—" Cordovan started to propose.

"No, by God!" bellowed Hampton. "When I start a thing, I finish it. Not a man touches his cards until we drink!"

"And we don't drink," added Larry, "until we get some water."

"Who'll go?" Jim asked.

"Let's draw for it," proposed Cordovan.

We took a new deck of cards, shuffled them, and drew—the low man to go for water.

Shaw had a jack, I got a queen, Hampton a seven, and Cordovan a four. We all thought he was elected; but Steve Johns drew a tray.

"Hampton," I suggested, "let's play out this hand before he goes, and then the rest can play while he is gone."

"No!" Hampton grew more emphatic

the more he was crossed. "Not a damned card shall be moved until he comes back and we have that drink."

We had to acquiesce. Steve Johns took the bucket. There was a return of his old lightness as he paused at the door and called to us:

"A merry wait, gentlemen—for water!"

III

THE wind was blowing stiffly, and Cordovan sprang up to shut the door after Steve. Then we sat around, smoking and talking intermittently, for ten or fifteen minutes. The wind had come up, and was blowing in from the sea. A loose shutter somewhere banged occasionally, and I jumped each time.

After a time I got up, went to the west end of the big room, and ran the shade up. The moon rode near the zenith, but there were scudding clouds that sent long, dark shadows scurrying over the sea. In the patches of light I could see whitecaps. The window was not tightly shut, and little gusts of wind sucked through. The chill of it made me shiver, more from nerves than cold, and I turned back into the room.

The talk had almost subsided, and there were only occasional outbursts of half drunken wit. The conversation finally died. Cigarettes had gone out, and the smokers seemed too indifferent to relight. Jim Shaw was drunk enough to begin to doze in his chair.

"Hell!" Hampton's big voice startled us. "How long does it take to go to that spring?"

"He'll be back directly," suggested Larry Davis.

"Did he know the way?" asked the judge. "I've heard of lots of fellows getting lost in search of water."

"He knew the way, all right," said Larry. "He went down with me to get the Mexican this evening. I needed him to talk Spanish."

We waited ten minutes more. Again I went back to the window. Jim Shaw roused up, stalked across the room to the table, and started to take a drink from the bottle.

"Put it down!" thundered Hampton. "I said not a drink till that water comes!"

Jim set the bottle down, and ambled over to the window by me.

"Damn fussy!" he said peeishly. "Thinks he's running this poker game!"

Then we both stood staring out to sea.

"I thought I saw a boat out there," Jim observed. "Looked like sails."

"You are seeing things," I said sharply.

I had seen the same thing, but I did not want to admit it, for it looked more like a ghost ship to me than one with real sails. Jim rubbed his half drunken eyes, and pressed his face against the glass.

"Maybe I am," he said dubiously; "but if there isn't a boat out there, you can ride me to hell on a rail!"

Just then a big cloud swallowed up the apparition. When the shadow passed, the thing was gone.

"Say!" I turned to Jim. "It's time that Steve was back. I'm going to look for him."

But the rest derided the idea.

"You'll get lost, and then the game will be delayed while we hunt for you," said Hampton.

I sat down and waited. The wind came in stronger gusts. The loose shutter gave a slam that made me jump half out of my chair.

"See here!" I said determinedly. "I'm going after Johns. If any of you fellows want to go along, all right!"

"Let's all go," suggested Cordovan.

I could see that they felt a bit uneasy, too.

"Wait until I get a flash light from the car," Hampton proposed.

The six of us started off to the south, in the general direction of the Mexican shack. Hampton threw his light on the path ahead, leaving us grouped in darkness. Something of fear and the weirdness of the night drew us closer together. I felt Larry Davis touch my arm.

"You don't suppose," he whispered huskily, "that anything has happened?"

I did not reply. I was afraid to say what I felt.

We went all the way to the spring. No sign of Steve! All of us were uneasy then. We roused up the Mexican, but, of course, he had been asleep, and there was no chance for him to know anything.

Hampton turned his flash light on the soft earth below the spring—one had to approach that way.

"He's been here," he said. "There's a fresh track."

We searched in every direction for several hundred yards, and shouted time after time. Our voices sounded thin and eerie

in the stiff sea wind that blew against the mountains.

"Maybe he has come in while we were gone," some one suggested hopefully.

We turned back. A hundred yards up the slope, Hampton, now thoroughly sobered, put his light on the path.

"There's a fork to the left," he said. "Maybe Steve took that, and got lost."

I knew where that fork went. It led to the edge of the cliff overlooking the sea. We followed it for two hundred yards. It came to the steepest point of the cliff—and ended there as if it ran off into space.

"Good God!" It was Hampton's heavy voice that broke in horror. "There's the bucket!"

The tin pail stood there, full of water, on the very edge of the cliff; but all about was empty space—and wind from the sea.

We all went as close to the edge as we dared. Then I got down on hands and knees and crawled to the very edge, holding on with my hands to the rocks. The flash light would not reach so far down, but in the moonlight I saw something dark on the narrow strip of sand at the bottom—something that looked like a man's body.

I crawled back, and then got slowly to my feet.

"He's over there, boys!"

My voice shook with horror.

"Is there any way down?" we asked the Mexican.

He shook his head. It could only be reached by boat, and to-night, with the waves breaking over the rocks, to land with a small boat would be impossible.

We got a rope and some straps from the machine, which, pieced together, might reach. I went down, the rest holding the rope; but when I reached the bottom, the tide had swept the strip of sand, and the waves were washing over it. Steve's body was gone!

We went back to the clubhouse.

"Build up a fire," I said, shivering, for I was wet.

Cordovan mechanically rekindled the dying fire, and threw on some pine chunks. We sat before the blaze, but none of us felt the warmth, no one spoke for a time.

"Well, I'll be damned!" Hampton said in reverent regret. "Who'd have thought it would end that way for Steve?"

We talked, then, of the lovableness of the fellow. We all said how sorry we were he hadn't told us that he was hard up.

"I knew he had been playing in hard luck for some time," said Jim Shaw; "but I supposed he could afford to. Why, good Lord, I'd have loaned him, or given him, five times as much as he had lost, if he'd told me!"

We all tried to comfort ourselves by thinking of the good things we would have done for poor Steve, if we had only known.

"I wonder," suggested Cordovan, "what his last hand was!"

"Let's see what all the hands were," said Hampton, "and look at Steve's last of all."

One by one, each man picked up his hand. It proved to be the best set of hands of the whole night. Larry had three jacks and Hampton three queens. Shaw had made a king-high straight. I had an ace-high spade flush. Cordovan, drawing two pair, had made a full house.

"We would have bet our heads off on these hands," I said. "Let's see what poor Steve got."

Hampton picked up the remaining hand. He stared, holding four cards in his left hand and tapping them with the last card—the one that Steve had drawn. We waited in silence for him to speak.

"Here is what he drew to." He threw the cards down, face up—ten, jack, queen and king of diamonds. He threw down the last card—the ace of diamonds. A royal flush!

We stared at one another, with the same thought in every man's mind. That hand would have won back all that Steve had lost.

"If we had only played it out—"

The look on Hampton's face made Cordovan break off the suggestion.

"Or if I hadn't been so damned drunk that I spilled the water—" Hampton added blackly.

"Or if one of us had gone with him—"

IV

AFTER daylight we made a long search for poor Steve's body—in vain. Finally we gave it up and started north. It was a silent company in that car as the heavy machine pounded its way over the rough road.

That was three years ago. Last month I was in Mexico City on business. The third evening after my arrival, a messenger boy brought a note to my room at the Regis Hotel.

He could not understand my Spanish, nor I his English. The note was written in Spanish. I took it down to the clerk, who read it, and began to smile.

"Eet says," he interpreted, "that Señor Murray is invite to a po-kar party at the home of Señor Hons to-night."

I was surprised. I knew no Señor Hons in Mexico City. Moreover, I had not sat in a poker game since that fatal night; but I accepted, and at eight o'clock I went to the address given. It was a beautiful new stucco house in the Colonia Hermosa. A servant let me in.

As I entered the sitting room, one of the most charming Spanish women I have ever seen rose and offered me her hand.

"Eet ees Señor Murray?"

"Yes," I said; "and you are Señora Hons?"

"Sí, sí!" She nodded brightly. "The señor is delay. He come ver' soon."

Ten minutes later there were steps on the stairs. I half turned my head, and then I leaped to my feet.

"Steve Johns!"

Steve came up, laughing, and gripped my hand.

"You are early, as usual, Murray. The rest of the bunch—the American consul and five fellows from the American Club—will be here by and by."

"But, Steve," I said, after I had recovered my breath, "we thought you were dead!"

He shook his head whimsically.

"No—only broke, and I didn't have the nerve to confess it. The Mexican had told me of a boat up from Guaymas that was anchored in the inlet below. When I went for that water, I decided to beat it, and to leave the bucket as evidence of suicide."

We smoked in silence for a few minutes.

"Isn't it queer," he said seriously, "how luck turns on a trivial thing? If old Bart Hampton hadn't spilled that water that night, I'd never have come to Mexico City. I'd never have had my present happiness"—his wave indicated the *señora*—"nor been manager of a prosperous silver mine!"

I sighed and shook my head. It was beyond me.

"Fate may shuffle the cards of chance for us," added Steve, as steps sounded at the front door; "but sometimes the deal is good luck instead of tragedy."

THE LOVER'S SPRING

THERE among the hills we know
Our stream is running;
Scarcely melted is the snow,
Yet on its banks the violets blow,
Daintily sunning.

All the happy things return—
Blossom, bee, and starling.
Green wands of the silent fern,
Virgin gold the meadows burn—
All that rimes with "darling."

Woodlands with the thought of you
Are wearing bowers,
Fairylike, upholstered new
With hangings green and gold and blue
Of freshest flowers.
All is glad and all agleam,
All is ready for our dream
To come back beside the stream!

Richard Leigh

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT—In compliance with what we believe to be the preference of the great majority of our readers, all fiction appearing in MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE will hereafter be printed complete in each number. Next month's issue will contain two exceptionally good novelettes and a fine collection of short stories.

Flowers for Miss Riordan

A CAVALIER'S FLORAL TRIBUTE WHICH HELPED ITS RECIPIENT TO ACHIEVE THE FREEDOM OF HER SOUL

By Elisabeth Sanxay Holding

THE gates were opened, and the crowd went shuffling and pushing out of the dim ferry house. Fleet and glittering motor cars shot by, and after them came thundering trucks, and great dray horses with earth-shaking tramp—the whole world going by on parade, until it seemed that only an enchanted ship could hold all of it. Then bells clanged and winches rattled, the gates shut before Miss Riordan's nose, and off went the boat, with the world aboard, leaving in its wake a strip of foaming water that after a while grew tranquil and a lucent green.

Miss Riordan turned back and began to saunter up and down the ferry house. She wore an annoyed expression. She was a cruel lady, frowning upon the tardiness of her cavalier, who was doubtless rushing to her from somewhere, breathless and humbly apologetic.

"I am here," she said in effect, "and I may as well wait, but it shall never happen again—never!"

Two boats gone! That meant forty minutes.

"Well, of course, I came too early," she reflected. "That makes it seem longer; but I just won't wait after the next one."

She knew she would, though. He knew it, too—knew he would find her there. He would come when it suited him, and there she would be, waiting for him.

"He makes me sick!" she said to herself, with a sudden rush of tears. "Who does he think he is, anyway? I bet, if everything was known—"

But she hoped the time would never come when everything was known, even if it should effect the well deserved humiliation of Mr. Louis Pirini.

On the Day of Judgment there would be an angel with an immense book. He would

ask you questions, and write down your answers in letters of fire; but he would know the right answers beforehand, or have them on file somewhere, so you'd have to be careful what you said. It was a comfort to think, though, that if that time came, you would be purely a soul, without bodily contours, and certainly without age. Miss Riordan was not very clear in mind about her sins, but she knew well enough which were the things that filled her with the greatest shame and guilt—her age and her physical luxuriance.

"Well, anyhow, I don't look it!" she said forlornly to herself. "He don't really know. He just tries to tease me—but I don't care!"

The energy she was obliged to expend in not caring for the humorous remarks of Mr. Louis Pirini was, however, a considerable drain upon her nervous system. Usually she was able to laugh when he did; but sometimes he was too mean, and then she cried—a weakness she dreaded beyond measure. Always, whether she laughed or cried, when he was with her and when he was absent, she was filled with a passionate resentment against him.

Her grievances had grown monstrous; her heart was bursting with them. Sometimes, when she lay awake at night, she thought that the only good thing in the world would be to "get even" with him.

But Mr. Pirini was safe as an immortal god from her vengeance. There was no conceivable way in which she could hurt him. She couldn't retaliate by making unpleasant remarks about his personal appearance, because they both knew that he was superb. She could not shame him by reminding him of all she had done for him—she had tried that once. She couldn't even tell any one of her own generosity and

his vile ingratitude. On the contrary, she felt obliged to lie quite wildly. When she bought anything new, she pretended that Louis had given it to her. When they went out together, she pretended that it was his treat.

"And he just stands there grinning!" she thought. "All I've done for him, and look how he acts! Look at last Sunday, down to Coney, when we met Sadie. She's seen me and Louis going together nearly a year. It was perfectly natural for her to say was him and me going to get married; and what did he up and say, after all I've done for him? 'Sure we are,' he says, 'when hell freezes over!' I'd just like to have told Sadie a thing or two about him!"

Unattainable consolation! She couldn't ever tell any one, for nobody would understand. She did not even care to bring the matter to the attention of God prematurely, for she feared He would not consider all the evidence, but would give a judgment based upon one or two salient facts; and the facts were somehow so insignificant, compared with her feelings.

Twelve minutes, now, before the next boat. A sort of panic seized her. He mustn't come and discover her walking up and down like this, as if she were impatient, as if she were eagerly waiting for him. No—she would be found reading something with profound interest, unconscious of the passing of time, of the waste of this Saturday afternoon, so precious to her after a week's work in the factory.

She sauntered up to the news stand and fluttered over the pages of a magazine. She thought it was "high-class," and yet it was full of pictures. She paid for it, and sat down on a bench.

"Well, I read a lot of good things in school," she reflected, always on the defensive. "'Hiawatha,' and all that. I was real good in English."

She turned to an article on Turkey, a country which she thought immoral and interesting, but it was difficult to divert her attention from her feet. Funny, the way they hurt more when you were sitting down than when you were walking!

"Maybe I might have took a half a size longer," she reflected. "Well, anyways! This shiny paper kind of hurts my eyes. It's an awful foolish thing to wear glasses—makes you look so much older; only they do say it gives you wrinkles to squint."

Wistfully she looked at the photograph

of a group of Turkish beauties. Certainly they were all stout, but somehow it was a different sort of stoutness; and their eyes, their languorous, ardent eyes.

"Yes, but I bet if everything was known—" thought Miss Riordan.

Just then she became aware that some one was looking at her—some one who had sat down beside her. She began to assume various expressions of interest in her magazine. She frowned, as if absorbed. She raised her eyebrows, amazed. She smiled and shook her head, incredulous. Then, as she turned the page, she cast a furtive sidelong glance, to see who it was.

It was a little old man with a woeful face. His wrinkled brow, his hanging jowls, and his sad, dim old eyes gave him rather the look of a superannuated hound. Perhaps he was pathetic, but not to Miss Riordan. She was very angry. She stared at him in haughty surprise, and turned back to her magazine; but she could still feel his eyes fixed upon her.

"The nerve of the man!" she thought indignantly.

Presently he moved a little nearer and cleared his throat, as if about to speak. This time she gave him a look calculated to destroy; but, just the same, he did speak.

"I see you are reading *Travel*," he said. She glared at him.

"I have had the honor of contributing one or two articles to that publication," he went on. "Little sketches of my various journeys; but after all—" He smiled. "After all," he said, "east or west, home is best. I always return to Staten Island with renewed appreciation."

Miss Riordan was perturbed. She did not wholly understand this speech, but she was impressed, and she was embarrassed. Clearly she had misjudged this man. There was no occasion here for haughty glances. He was venerable.

"Yes," he continued, "I find a rare combination of beauties in Staten Island. The stirring panorama of the bay, with ships from the four corners of the earth, the drowsy little hamlets, and the hills. The words of our national anthem have always seemed to me peculiarly applicable to the island—'I love thy rocks and rills, thy woods and templed hills.' May I ask if you are a resident?"

"You mean do I live there? Well, no," said Miss Riordan. "I just go there sometimes, with my friend."

"Ah!" said he. "There are so many delightful rambles — hilltop vistas which linger long in the memory."

Miss Riordan and her friend were in the habit of taking the train at St. George and going direct to South Beach. The vistas on that journey had not appealed to her as memorable, nor had her rambles along the boardwalk been especially delightful; but she did not care to say so.

"I like the country," she observed timidly, and was enchanted to see by his face that this pleased him.

He went on talking—which was what she desired. She would have sat there for hours, listening to him. Never had she heard such words, never imagined such refinement. She was filled with reverence that was almost awe. And when he talked poetry!

He quoted in his tremulous old voice:

"To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears."

It was too much! Miss Riordan's own thoughts did not lie too deep. Her tears welled up and brimmed over. She wiped her eyes with her perfumed handkerchief, and mutely shook her head.

Her companion had long since passed the age of such facile relief. He peered at her in kindly distress, unable to find assuaging words for a grief so inexplicable.

"Please wait a moment!" he said, and with a little difficulty got upon his feet. "Just wait a moment, please! I'll be back directly."

She believed him, and while she waited, confident that he would return to her, she thought about this thing in a misty fashion.

Not yet in her life had Miss Riordan attempted to account for her emotions. She felt, and that sufficed. She had no idea why the old gentleman's discourse upon the natural beauties of Staten Island should have made her weep. She did not know why his talk had so charmed her. She knew only, cared only, that a strange, tearful happiness had come upon her.

"I guess he liked to talk to me!" she thought, with satisfaction beyond measure.

Then she saw him coming toward her again, toddling along in his long overcoat, with a little bouquet of roses in his gloved hand.

"Oh, my goodness!" thought Miss Riordan, beginning to cry again. "Did you ever?"

He sat down beside her, a little out of breath.

"If you'll allow me," he said, proffering the flowers. "From one lover of Wordsworth to another. I saw that you were much moved by my little allusion."

"You hadn't ought to have done it!" said Miss Riordan, with a sob. "I just don't know what to say!"

She held the flowers to her nose, and her tears rained upon them. This was her first bouquet. Her next would very likely come when she was no longer able to enjoy its fragrance or shed any more tears.

"A feeling heart!" said the old gentleman. "There! Isn't that the bell? We'd better make our way on board, madam, or we shall be crowded out."

"I can't! I got to wait!" she cried in despair; "but I'll go with you as far as the gates."

So she did. When they got there, he removed his hat and held out his hand, standing before her bareheaded and in matchless dignity, in spite of the jostling crowd. She took his hand and squeezed it hard.

"Good-by!" she said. "Do take care of yourself!"

II

SHE watched the old gentleman as he made his way toward the cabin. Each time some one brushed against him, she cried under her breath:

"Stop that pushing! Ain't you ashamed of yourself?"

"What you mutterin' about?" asked a voice behind her.

Turning, she confronted her Louis.

"Well!" she exclaimed indignantly. "You're a nice one, you are! But come on! Hurry up! We can get this boat."

He caught her arm and held her back.

"No!" he said. "Too late to go down to the island to-day."

"Too late!" said she. "And me waiting here all the afternoon! What do you mean, too late?"

"When I say too late, I mean too late," replied Mr. Pirini, with his own special insolence.

"Well!" said Miss Riordan. "I don't care!"

This speech was surely a cue for exit, but she did not go. She said to herself, as usual, that she just wanted to stay and tell that fellow what she thought of him—which was manifestly impossible, as she had

never yet been able to discover what she really did think of him, except that she hated him.

There he stood, with his gray spats and his gray felt hat, worn rakishly, and even new gray gloves. She knew that he had no job, nothing at all to justify his swagger. Very likely he hadn't enough in his pocket to pay for his dinner. What cared he? He wouldn't even thank her if she paid for it.

"Now you just look here, Louis!" she began in a trembling voice.

"All right! I'm lookin'!" said he.

His white teeth showed in a broad smile, and his eyes were fixed steadily upon her. Though Miss Riordan, when she looked in the mirror, may have seen an image which somewhat flattered the truth, she had no illusions as to how she appeared in the eyes of Mr. Pirini. She tried to roll the magazine so that her hands should be concealed. She changed the position of her feet.

"All right!" she said. "You can keep on looking!"

"You bin cryin'," observed her cavalier.

That was too much! Those tears were not to be mentioned by him.

"You mind your own business!" she retorted hotly. "I wasn't crying over you, anyways!"

She saw that he didn't believe that.

"Have it your own way," he said soothingly. "Whadder you say we go an' get some dinner?"

"No!" replied Miss Riordan, and sat down upon the nearest seat.

She always rejected his suggestions—at first; but, as always, she regretted what she had done. Here was the very situation she had dreaded—herself seated, flushed, struggling against her ever ready tears, while he stood there smiling.

"All right!" he said. "We'll stay here, then."

This was another familiar move. How many victories had he won by his patience, his smiling silence! He could wait, and he could hold his tongue, and she could do neither.

"And me waiting here all afternoon!" she burst out. "And then you come and you say it's too late to go down to the island. Well, what made you come so late?"

He did not answer. Another crowd had begun to move toward the gates, like a herd seized with a migratory impulse. Perhaps

something of that ancient instinct stirred now in Miss Riordan. Certainly she had a melancholy sensation of being left behind, abandoned, while her fellow creatures moved on toward a better land—toward a Staten Island green and fair, where in a glen a cataract came foaming down, and wild flowers grew, very much like a landscape which hung up in her furnished room. Well, didn't she, too, wish to see that lovely spot?

"I'm going to take the next boat!" she announced, rising.

"All right!" said Louis. "I'm not. Good-by!"

She wavered shamefully between the quite real Louis and the imaginary Staten Island.

"I'm going!" she answered in a loud, firm voice, but added: "Unless you say you're sorry you were so late."

"Sure! I'm sorry!" answered Louis readily. "Now let's go an' get some dinner somewhere. All dressed up to kill, ain't you? Bought yourself some flowers an' everything!"

Miss Riordan had temporarily forgotten her bouquet. She glanced down at the pallid blossoms, fainting in her hot hands, and a very curious emotion came over her.

"No, I did not buy them for myself!" she said vehemently. "They were given to me."

"Sure!" said Louis. "Rudolph Valentino give 'em to you, didn't he?"

"Now you look here, Louis! A gentleman gave them to me—he *bought* them for me."

"Oh, Gawd!" said Louis.

"He did! You stop your laughing!"

But Mr. Pirini was so overwhelmed that he was obliged to drop into the seat beside her, and there he sat, his handsome head thrown back, all his strong white teeth showing in a prodigious and soundless laugh. Miss Riordan turned upon him in a fury.

"You stop that!" she commanded. "You just better believe me! It's the truth! A gentleman came and sat down beside me and began talking to me, and by and by he got me them flowers."

"Sure I believe you!" said Louis. "Why wouldn't I?"

For a moment she could not speak. Her hate, and the insufferable conviction of her impotence, made her heart beat fast and violently. She felt stifled in a desperate

struggle against complete submersion. Louis would not believe her. She could not make him believe in her gentleman, and to doubt his existence was to deny her a soul. That the old gentleman had talked poetry to her and given her flowers was the sole proof of her own immortal value.

"I tell you it's true!" she said in a choked voice.

"Sure!" replied Louis, still grinning.

His unfaith was destroying her. Under his arrogant, smiling glance she was disintegrating. The woman whom the old gentleman had addressed, the woman who longed for the mystic beauties of Staten Island as one longs for Paradise, was being done to death, and there would remain only the creatures she saw in her mirror—this ungainly body, this flushed and troubled face. No! No! She had been worthy of the poetry and the flowers. It was Louis who was too base to see her worth.

III

HER hot anger began to cool, to harden into an emotion which she did not comprehend. She stared back at Louis, at first with scorn, but after a moment with puzzled curiosity. Had he always looked like this? Never any different from this?

"You look so kind of funny to-day!" she observed wonderingly.

"Funny? What d'you mean, funny?" he demanded.

"I don't know," she said, still staring at him. "Just—so kind of—measly."

His swarthy face turned dark red, and in a low voice he made a forcible retort; but Miss Riordan was past anger. She was looking at her bouquet, lifting up the drooping heads with anxious care.

"I'll dry 'em in a nice little jar," she thought. "I guess they'll keep forever that way."

Louis was still talking.

"You'd better go away," she said casually. "I'm going down to the island."

He got up promptly.

"I'll go, all right!" said he. "An' you can git down on your knees an' beg me, an' I'll never come back. Let me tell you—"

"Oh, go on!" said Miss Riordan with mild impatience.

He walked away, swaggering, his gray felt hat to one side, his toes pointed out, his curly hair pushed up at the back of the neck by his high collar. He passed through the turnstile and out of the ferry house, and then, as far as she was concerned, he ceased to exist. Miss Riordan got up and sauntered toward the gates.

"He's gone," she thought. "He'd come back if I'd ask him, but I won't!"

This was true. Mr. Pirini's charm had been completely dissolved in his laughter. He had refused to believe in her gentleman.

Thinking of that elderly cavalier, her heart swelled with enormous aspirations. Here she was going to the country for a ramble, and carrying a high-class magazine and that mystically precious bouquet. It seemed to her that a monstrous burden had been lifted from her shoulders. Shame, resentment, and miserable anxiety had departed with Mr. Pirini.

She raised the bouquet to her face and sniffed it vigorously.

"I'm going to get a real *comfortable* pair of shoes!" she said to herself. "A size—two sizes—bigger!"

The freedom of Miss Riordan's soul was achieved.

THE SINGING HEART

WHEN night that never seems to end
Drops over me, and no stars gleam,
There is a thing that cannot fail,
Forever singing, full of dream.

When unexpected twilights close,
Or rain begins to fall with dawn,
When day forsakes the kindly sun,
It is the singing heart goes on.

It is the singing heart goes on,
Bidding the face be glad again
Until the showing forth of day,
Until the lifting of the rain!

Harry Kemp

Fixed White

THE STORY OF SIGURD CARLSON, ASSISTANT KEEPER OF GULL
WING LIGHT, ON THE LONELY SHORE
OF LAKE MICHIGAN

By Karl W. Detzer

SIGURD CARLSON sat on the narrow iron deck of Gull Wing Light-house and looked out gravely over the wide lake. For an hour he had not moved. Ice was breaking in the distances below him, and Sigurd watched it with indifferent interest.

For two days the frozen drifts had crumbled. Sunshine glutted the north country, pouring out of a sky the color of freshly painted pleasure boats. Shore ice heaped into little bergs, which drummed and cannonaded on the rocks of Gull Wing Island, spilled, and heaped up again. Sigurd saw them, but did not hear. He was thinking. He was sick, should any one come to ask him—sick with loneliness.

The miserable winter had ended at last. It had been a long time from the twenty-first day of December, when ice jammed the east coast of Lake Michigan, until shipping began to move in the last week of March. In the closed season there was no light to tend, but there was the fog signal. In misty weather, in fog, in snow, the brass steam whistle must sound its warning, day or night.

Twice since December Sigurd Carlson had crossed the ice to town. Now, in three or four days, there would come the message from the district superintendent, announcing that navigation would open on March 27. After that, every night from sundown to sunrise, Sigurd Carlson or his father must watch Gull Wing Light with slow, monotonous punctuality.

Sigurd bent his head and looked toward the southeast with vacant eyes. The bluish pine-clad hillocks of the Michigan coast showed landward. Toward the hills, striving to reach them and never able to do it,

Gull Wing Island spread its tips—yellow, flat stretches like a bird's open wings. For sixty-nine years the island light had stood there, lifting its whitewashed tower out of the sand. Sixty-nine years—and Sigurd was twenty-one!

It was not a place to interest an artist. Blunt and flat-faced, like an ugly barn, Gull Wing Light stands on the western tip of sand, a plain, matter-of-fact beam atop a white brick house. Above the roof, which is of colorless slate, a round tower pokes up solidly, cut off short ten yards from the ridgepole.

The white beam is steady in that orthodox tower. On clear nights, by the navigators' charts, its visibility is eighteen and one-half miles. It is a flame unblinking—fixed white, in the terms of seamen. Let the light on South Fox twinkle like an enchanted ruby. Let North Manitou flash vivacious crimson and ivory. Let Round Island wink capriciously. Let Leland pier-head glow like an aged, dying coal; still Gull Wing burns fixed white.

An exemplary, unimaginative light—a trying berth for keeper or assistant. Water and sand, water reeds and sand grass, great distances, loneliness, endless winds—these are the companions of the keepers of Gull Wing Light.

And Sigurd Carlson was twenty-one!

He had come to the island so long ago that he could remember no other existence. That was before his mother died. Sigurd did remember her. He remembered her hands, large and friendly, and her voice as she sang weird, monotonous songs—words that seemed to have no meaning, repeated over and over. Her name was Hilda—he remembered that, too. Once her German

father had come to visit them there—a fat man with terrifying red whiskers, who panted when he walked in deep sand.

All that had been before Sigurd was six, in the days when he fashioned boats of driftwood and floated them among the rocks. Then came winters on the mainland, when he spent lonely, disconsolate weeks in a farmhouse on the road to Cedar Point, and waded snowdrifts to the schoolhouse at the corner. In the summers he went back to the island, where he learned from his father that white paint, polished lenses, and brass lamps are sacred things, never to be soiled by the touch of a bare hand. From Olaf Carlson, too, he learned of duty.

His father had seemed very old to Sigurd in those days—quite as old as he was now. He was one of those bitter, wind-bitten men who quit the sea on a whim and, once ashore, take root, to spend the rest of their lives eying the horizon and complaining of destiny. Spare, austere, faultfinding, for thirty years he had done grudging penance for his desertion from the sea, till the skin had tightened over his bones and his voice had pitched up a note. A hard man, of brittle temper and sulky discipline, there was no assistant keeper on all the coast who willingly shared old Olaf Carlson's watches.

Sigurd was assistant keeper now. For some reason which he never had thought to analyze, Olaf's son went into the service when he was eighteen, and applied for the post at Gull Wing Light. There was no other applicant. Who else, knowing old Olaf Carlson and Gull Wing Island, would ask to share that monotonous and melancholy tedium of sand and lake, of sky and everlasting wind?

The air breathed past from the west, chill with a tang of ice, yet soft with the first fury, whimsical warmth of spring. Sigurd shut his eyes and let its fragrance wash against his face. Over on the mainland buds would be opening, he reflected, and farmers driving to town. Old Mr. Rosenbottle, the traveling salesman, would be dropping off at Cedar Bridge, with his eleven sample cases, to tell his newest story, to fascinate the merchants with the latest Grand Rapids fashions, and to explain with enthusiastic detail the mysteries of his improved casting reel. The North Star Picture Palace would open on Saturday nights, and Selma Peltier would come down from

her father's farm in the hills to play the asthmatic concertina.

Spring!

The trapdoor at the back of the lamp swung open, and old Olaf poked out his frosty face. Sigurd got upon his feet, less alarmed than ashamed at his idleness.

"Lenses polished?" his father wanted to know.

The two faced each other upon the narrow iron decking. Sigurd was a head taller than his father—a strong, grave boy, with a Norseman's quiet eyes, and pink cheeks that had come from his German mother. The upper lakes thought he was handsome.

"No," he replied at length. "Been watching the ice go out."

"Finish up!" The high note squalled into old Olaf's voice. His hands hitched at the iron rail, but swiftly drew back from the chill of its touch. He scowled, casting the skin of his face into astounding wrinkles. "There'll be a new assistant some day, I'm tellin' you," he warned through thin lips. "Lazy aroun'—all the time lazy aroun'!"

Sigurd opened the door and stepped into the tiny, glaring octagon that held the lamp. Brasses and lenses dazzled his eyes. They broke the sunlight into a thousand minute spectra and flung it away in lost, blinding rays. With a square of chamois skin he set to work polishing glasses.

At sundown on the 25th the ice was running fast, with a stiff wind from the south urging it along. There remained a thousand tasks to be done. Keeper and assistant worked into the night, on ladder and stair, cleaning the oil storage room, scrubbing, painting, polishing the signal house, preparing for the birth of spring. Every minute Olaf Carlson scolded, complained, ranted bitterly of this and that.

On the night of the 26th the light blazed forth. Only thin cakes of shore ice scrambled along the wash. Already incautious masters of ugly little tramp steamers soiled the horizon with coal smoke. Polished, burnished, whitewashed, trimmed, Gull Wing Light took up its simple, soul trying duties for another season.

It made little difference to the keepers. There was still the loneliness. Olaf whined and bickered as much as usual, growing coldly impatient, smug, and querulous by turns. Sigurd listened with a stolid show of indifference. He did his job, answered not half of his father's vindictive and acid

commentaries, and looked forward silently to his first day ashore.

II

THE day came in middle April—a Saturday afternoon. The ice had gone, and the lake drummed disconsolately upon the sand of the outer sweep. Erratic winds shuffled across the points. In the little rocky harbor rode Sigurd Carlson's boat—a catboat with patched sail and a long sweep of tiller.

Seven miles away, a speck on the coast, lay Hill's Pier, a mildewed logging town that had somehow lived on after the timbermen finished the cut. Behind it, five miles over the hills, bustled Cedar Bridge, the terminus of a twisting railroad line. In Cedar Bridge there was gossip, there was the smell of farm horses—and there, too, would be Selma Peltier.

"Taking my twenty-four hours off," Sigurd told his father at breakfast.

"Where?"

"Town."

"Huh!"

That was all. Words have a way of losing their potency after two men have lived many lonely months together. There was defiance in Sigurd's short statement. There was resentment in his father's reception of it; but of what use is argument?

Young Carlson polished his boots by the kitchen step, pressed out his uniform, buttoned his blue shirt at the throat, and knotted a black necktie over it—a concession to the conventions of Cedar Bridge. His father watched glumly, but said nothing.

The catboat was of clinker build, a temperamental craft that needed nice handling; but Sigurd Carlson had no time to waste. He thrashed recklessly across the bay, his sheet stretched, his canvas bellied, while he held the tiller in the crook of his arm. At Hill's Pier he heaved the boat high on the sand, and immediately set off on foot across the dunes.

In the middle of the afternoon he reached Cedar Bridge. He marched straight to the store on the corner, and, with the ruthless prodigality of one who has suffered long, smokeless watches, bought recklessly of tobacco. There were other purchases, but they could wait. The train was whistling back in the hills. In a moment it would come thumping over its uneven roadbed, with steamy wheezes, and would rattle to the end of its prosaic journey. Already

men, with no better reason than Sigurd Carlson's own, were trooping toward the station. People met the train in Cedar Bridge.

When it halted, two farmers got off. Sigurd Carlson stood in gummy April mud and watched the unimportant incidents of arrival. It took twelve minutes to load the milk cans. That accomplished, the dumpy, panting engine crawled back to the switch, where, with an astounding amount of puffing and pulling, it turned toward the south. In three hours it would be in Traverse City. Sigurd watched it hungrily until the last car dipped into a cedar grove, till the last thin flutter of steam had died away above the sand hills.

Now there was the North Star Theater.

This was a disheveled, sprawly building, which in lumbering days had been a dance hall. Over the box office, where Abner Joyce, a newcomer in Cedar Bridge, made change and passed out tickets and remarks, there was tacked a three-color picture claiming to be Paris. Sigurd Carlson looked at it without emotion. It might be Paris. At least it was brighter than Gull Wing Island.

Here he would spend the evening, seeing the same scratched film thrice repeated, re-reading three times the ill written advertising slides of county merchants, listening to an enchanted concertina in the hands of Selma Peltier.

He looked at his watch. Five minutes to four! Selma usually came down about that time on Saturdays.

He discovered her father first. Pierre Peltier greeted the young man boisterously. He climbed like a squirrel out of his muddy spring wagon and grasped both of Sigurd's hands in his own.

Young Carlson always liked Peltier's talk. He was a short, leathery, cordial fellow, of loud and volcanic affections, who went about his world chirruping that his lot was a joyous one, shamelessly boasting how good his soil was and how pretty his daughter was. Sigurd had been born a Norseman; but they were pleasant, these French. They loved their families.

"My boy!" Pierre cried. "Ah, these hun'ert t'ousan' time we speak of you. How are you? Your papa? That is good! Ump! Selma? Here, in the store. She must get off at the store quick and spend money! Ump!"

He poked Sigurd in the ribs vehemently.

"I think I'll go find her," said Sigurd. Selma had bought the gingham for old Mme. Plamondon, and the sugar for Bert Couturier, and the block of salt for Henri Belanger. Sigurd met her at the door.

She seemed startled to see him—as much startled as pleased. For a moment she said nothing, but merely looked at Sigurd with her black diamond eyes, which were the admiring talk of Cedar Valley. She was a small, rugged, handsome girl of nineteen— younger than she looked. Peasant blood showed in her shoulders and waist.

As dark as her father, there was something soft and satiny about her which took away the swarthy tone that clouded his face. Her eyes were wide-set, with a peculiar Latin brightness that gave her the expression of an inquisitive chipmunk. Old Henri Richard, back in the valley, had said once that you could hide a young shoat in the dimple on her left cheek. Henri had been coarse and given to slight exaggeration.

"Hello, Sig!" she said at length. "Gee whiz, who'd think you'd be around?"

"Say, Selma, I was lookin' for you!"

After she had heaped her purchases upon the counter, they shook hands—the cool, casual handshake of propriety. Neither forgot for a moment that this was the metropolis of Cedar Bridge.

"Come over to the North Star, Sig," Selma whispered. "Step right in. I'll be practicing."

Cap in hand, he watched her go, footing along comfortably under her armload of bundles. After a moment he followed.

The air inside the theater smelled of dust, old carpet, old walls. Far down in front an electric light bit a notch in the opaque texture of darkness. Selma was testing her concertina.

"Hi, Sig!" her voice boomed toward him.

This was no place for confidences. Simple words took on extraordinary violence, there in the dark vacancy of the theater. Sigurd's own steps started uncanny echoes.

"Come on down!" she bade. "Nobody else here."

He kissed her this time—kissed her upon the forehead. She did not avoid his hard, grave face; but when he had set her free, she laughed and rubbed her cheek where his own had scraped it.

"Your lips are cold, like always," she complained.

"Kiss me again," he bade her. "How you been?"

"You're the chilly fellow!"

"I love you, Selma."

That was all, for a moment. Again she laughed. His eyes made her uneasy, so sternly and seriously did they look at her. She pushed him away and turned the light full.

"Gee whiz, you're queer!" she said. "You got me guessing. There's something of you, every time, that I can't find out!"

Sigurd could not answer. He might have repeated her sentence with truth, and flung its question back to her; for he did not understand, and never was to understand, any more than she. Selma Peltier had never heard of Sigurd Carlson's ancestors—those calm, blond Vikings of the north, who loved heroically and did stout-hearted acts of daring. A Swede was merely a Swede. Sigurd wasn't a Swede? Norse, then—whatever that was. They were all alike.

And Selma? Sigurd Carlson never had heard of those roisterous, boisterous men of the Midi, whose blood ran double time, who loved and fought and lived glamorously, whose lips were warm as the sunny hillsides that slant to the Mediterranean. Old Pierre was a Frenchy, wasn't he? Frenchies are only Canucks, along the Michigan coast. The tongue they speak is called "Canadian."

"You're a funny guy!" Selma said again.

She hated silences.

They dined importantly at the Cedar River House. It was an inelegant and unimposing hostel, wearing blatantly the indelible thumb prints of poverty, and filled with the odors of cooking. In the old days its customers had been loggers. With the end of timbering operations on a large scale, it clung to such patronage as Cedar Bridge afforded. An occasional traveling salesman, a potato buyer from Grand Rapids, infrequent lumberjacks from minor operations up the hills, farmers in town for a hilarious evening—only these kept the fires burning and the padlock off the door.

Half a dozen tables stood along the wall opposite the old bar. Selma chose the one nearest to the kitchen door and farthest from the phonograph.

Table talk is an art in its infancy on the Michigan fishing coast, but back in the hills, where Frenchmen out of the Canadas

bustle about their sandy acres, it has developed a splendid fluency, in spite of scanty subject matter. Selma chattered amiably of the potato crop, of the new priest at Cedar Bridge, of the wet spring, of calves and "critters." With an astounding mathematical memory she enumerated the new babies born in Cedar Valley during the winter.

The clock upon the wall gave forth a dismal succession of notes. It was six.

"Got to get going," she announced. "Come on! Make you acquainted with Mr. Joyce. He's come from Milwaukee to run the North Star this year."

They walked together the scant hundred yards to the theater. On Saturday night the streets of Cedar Bridge took on a spurious gayety. Gaslights shone in two store windows, sputtering foolishly in a late daylight. A dun vapor floated across the river valley. On the bridge and about the courthouse steps French farmers and Swede fishermen traded gossip.

III

FROM the dusty brilliance of his open ticket window, Abner Joyce watched the pair approach. He marked the long, bony legs of the lighthouse man, and beside him the short, jerky figure of Selma. She was a good concertina player. She brought in a lot of business. Joyce frowned. Could this be the fellow she had mentioned—this loutish Swede?

"Want to make you acquainted with Mr. Carlson," Selma said. "Shake with Mr. Joyce."

Sigurd gave his hand stiffly, thinking that Mr. Joyce had an unpleasant mouth, and followed Selma into the aisle. He chose a seat as near her as possible, in the front row at the left side.

Her two fellow musicians were already in their places. One, a lean, red-eyed lad with a pimply face, arranged two drums and a pair of cymbals importantly about him. Sigurd knew the other. He was a Frenchie from back in the hills, stone blind, with a head like a keg, and a granitic look on his placid face—a huge man, overlapping his chair. In his hands was a very small piccolo.

Selma climbed in between them with a flippant word for each. Her concertina was a fine affair for Cedar Bridge. Old Pierre had imported it, grumbling, from Grand Rapids, and had compelled his wife

and daughter to sell three of their choicest shoats to pay for it. Selma handled it deftly. As if the stops were as fragile as birds' eggs, she dusted each one carefully and rubbed the nickel plate.

Sigurd watched, with eyes that missed nothing. He had never heard Selma play. He waited impatiently while the Saturday night crowd shuffled in—French farmers, the Cedar Bridge children, a gang of lumbermen with hard, windy faces, a few old trappers, hulking fishermen from down the coast.

He did not notice the name of the film. All through its flickering Selma played, teasing her concertina, drawing from it longing notes and short cries of vivacity. Her teeth looked very white when she smiled at Sigurd through the dusty orchestra light. He did not move in his seat. As on the day when he watched the ice, he sat stiffly, thinking.

He liked the way Selma's fingers danced along the stops of her instrument. The room took on a shadowy vastness, in which her reeds made the only sound. She kept time gracefully with one foot. Her elbows flew. He could still see her dimple, in spite of the poor light. Sigurd's blue eyes grew round and extremely peaceful, and the line of his lips softened.

When the music flashed to an end, there was excited applause; but Sigurd did not raise his hands. Under Selma's touch the concertina had wrenched him with some subtle and sublime enchantment, which he neither understood nor wished to understand. He was faint with emotion. How could this be he, Sigurd Carlson, listening to music on land, freed from the loneliness of Gull Wing Light? It did not exist, that bare, hard life with his father.

This was the night of which he had dreamed, over and over again, on cold winter evenings when he sat in the kitchen of the lighthouse, his head in his hands, with nothing to do. This was his night! She had kissed him, and called him a chilly fellow!

The orchestra struck up again. Selma Peltier played alone this time—a simple folk song of the old French hills. It was a savage, courageous, gripping tune. The noisy crowd knew its notes by heart; but it was new to Sigurd Carlson. The songs his mother sang had been different from this—in minor keys, not so joyous. Sigurd's heartbreak was complete.

When her part was done, Selma stood up abruptly and slipped into the vacant seat beside him. He felt her fingers in his, and found them moist and warm. His own hand trembled a little. He wiped the sweat from his hard upper lip.

"Gee, it gives me the fidgets up and down my back!" she whispered.

"It was great!" he answered. "You alone, specially."

"It's a fine place, this. Ought to see the way people come! Shame it's open only Saturdays. I'd like to play every night."

"I'd like to hear you."

She squeezed his hand, and he felt ashamed of the bigness of his own.

"Won't have a chance to play here much longer," she said. "Joyce is going to sell."

The North Star Picture Palace closed its doors at ten o'clock—a repentance for its past, which had known no locks. Respectability follows relentlessly on the trail of indulgent pioneers.

Out in the street a dozen dirty cars waited in the mud. A few bored horses sloshed before the hitching rack at the post office.

"Dad rode out to Henri Richard's," Selma explained. "Wouldn't think of waiting. Gee whiz, my dad wouldn't set up past ten if I was to play a solo on a grub hoe! I'm spending the night with Marie—Marie Plamondon, cousin by my mother."

They turned toward the river, down a precipitous and sandy street, where the tranquil west wind blew caresses against their foreheads. Close together and silent, they walked to the gate of a clapboard house.

"You said the theater's for sale?" Sigurd asked.

"Abner Joyce is going to move back to Milwaukee—interests, he says, he's got to tend there. That's some kind of a business, I guess!"

"Who's going to buy it?"

Selma shrugged.

"There's lots want it."

Sigurd Carlson felt a hot touch of envy. He still yearned for more of the evening's music. He thought of the lighthouse at the tip of Gull Wing Island, of his father, surly as an east wind. All Olaf's life he had followed the sea, and what had it done to him?

"When's that Joyce going to sell?" he asked.

Selma Peltier slipped her arm confidingly through his.

"Soon as any one makes his price. He's cheap, Sigurd. Guess! He wants just fifteen hundred. Says there's a little mortgage to take over."

Sigurd Carlson felt a cold, reckless passion. Fifteen hundred dollars! He didn't have that much, but he could borrow. An amazing thought—he would never again need to polish the lenses! A man is driven to astounding and unbelievable excesses by the goadings of monotony.

The North Star Theater—Selma at the concertina—lights—faces—voices. Exchange for these the windy infinites of Gull Wing Light! He saw his father, that hitting, irascible despot of the sands. All in a moment he conjured up a thousand stark, merciless memories of the cruelty of his isolation. He need not go back—that is, he need not go back to stay.

"Selma, listen!" He tripped the words on his slow tongue. "If I could, Selma! If I was to get enough money to buy it! You know all about such things, and you'd help me run it."

"Help you, Sig?"

"We'd be married, Selma! I got some money, you know—saved it a purpose. I wonder if that Joyce is still there!"

"We can walk back and see," suggested Selma.

Abner Joyce had counted the receipts of the evening, and sat complacently with silver coins stacked in expressive rows before him.

"I got nine hundred saved," Sigurd explained. "Put it away when I worked on the fish boats, two years ago, and everything since then."

Mr. Joyce looked abstracted.

"Wait a minute," he said. "I just got through counting. Got to put it in my book before I forget it."

Sigurd watched while he set down a figure.

"Hundred and nine dollars and fifty cents—night's receipts," the owner of the North Star explained. "Well, I might take nine hundred cash and the rest on time. You could pay out of the profits. How soon would you want it?"

Sigurd turned to Selma. She smiled at him, and gave him approval in a little jerky nod.

"It takes a bit of time to get a resignation through in the service," Sigurd replied.

"Quite a bit, sometimes—two or three weeks."

Joyce agreed.

"No hurry," he said. "Think it over."

Sigurd left Selma at her gate, almost excitedly. He would soon be back! What could prevent it? He had been a fool to stay so long on Gull Wing Island. He kissed her good night with a new and desperate intensity.

"Gee whiz, you're a funny guy!" she said again.

She still baffled him. Over at the Cedar River House, in a cramped bedroom, he lay down to wakefulness. In the blue of early morning, after a scrambled breakfast, he strode across the sandy ridges toward Hill's Pier and his boat.

IV

It was mid forenoon when Sigurd hove over the tiller and nosed his impatient craft into its tiny harbor. Olaf Carlson, watching from the deck of the lighthouse, gave his son neither welcome nor recognition, but merely stood hard upon his feet, his eyes wide in the sun, immobile, unbending, like some crabbed and melancholy deity on a little whitewashed Olympus.

Sigurd let go his sheet and loosed the halyard, and his canvas dropped wearily across the side. Prodding his way with a broken oar, he brought the catboat up to the sand, heaved once, and set his face toward the lighthouse door.

"Drunk, or just women?" his father asked unpleasantly, in the kitchen.

The son held his tongue and his temper. Last night had armored his skin against any such abuse. He hung his cap upon a hook in the corner, glanced at the wood box, and, without comment, went out to the pile for an armload of fuel. When he came in, his father was still waiting.

"Went to the movies, saw some folks," Sigurd volunteered. "They's tobacco in the packet there."

Olaf Carlson forgot his own grievances. Opening his son's purchases hungrily, he filled and lighted his pipe.

"That's better," he muttered. "Drive a man maggoty, this being off the smoke!"

His face softened for an instant, and the line about his mouth grew slack. In the vehement enjoyment of the first few puffs he let slip his shell of callousness.

"Good time?" he asked unexpectedly. Then, without waiting for an answer:

"Best get ashore one day myself. Does a man good!"

Sigurd nodded. He was thinking of the North Star Theater.

That night, sitting on the sand in the April dark, he looked a long time at the fixed white light. It was a diabolical master. How did it happen that he had never shirked it? There was something brutal, something mocking, in its cold, steady eye. It knew that men must look after it. For sixty-nine years it had kept men slaves.

"Itshan't keep me!" Sigurd promised.

He rose stiffly and went inside to test the gas generator. It was nine o'clock.

At the same time, at the home of her cousin in Cedar Bridge, Abner Joyce, who was soon to move to Milwaukee, was meeting Selma Peltier.

"Did he fall?" the man asked.

"Hard!" Selma answered. "He's a funny guy—pretty chilly, but all the time white. He had me near upset once or twice. I almost told it to him—honest, I did—when he said good night!"

"Can he get the money?" Abner Joyce asked.

"He's got it. Wants to think it over. Wants me to marry him."

Abner Joyce looked into her eyes sharply. His own were narrow—the small eyes of a small conspirator. His face, doughy white, lacked lineaments of positive guilt. It only hung flabby with the marks of the cheaper vices.

"You're a bit cracked on him," he commented, and jangled the change in his pockets.

"I ain't," replied Selma, and her cheeks flushed.

She was not, like Joyce, a petty sinner. There was in her make-up, somewhere in her soul, the capacity for one single, bold, sincere transgression, a stupendous and awful iniquity. For her there would never be half measures, no lax succession of small improprieties.

Milwaukee beckoned, in the form of Abner Joyce, and with him the freedom that coast and hills prohibit. He offered release, deliverance, liberation from the stifling labor of Cedar Valley, from the monotonous existence that was the only heritage of Pierre Peltier's acres. Sigurd Carlson might stay alone to run the North Star Theater.

"When's he comin' back?" Joyce asked.

"Week—maybe two."

"When he comes, leave him to me."

It was two weeks before Sigurd Carlson returned. His father had smoked himself groggy, and, in an unusual and inexplicable mood, had gone ashore. He sailed home more tyrannical than ever. He spoke seldom. When he did, it was to find fault and bully, as if he would test to the stretching point the diminutive fragment of regard that still bound his son to him.

Sigurd listened with the cold, accumulative passion of a man whose blood runs slow. His father made it easy to decide. Why should he stay? Almost light-heartedly, with the knowledge that his monotony would soon be over, he punctually performed every routine task—for a week.

Those seven days were not comfortable ones. Fog hung upon the coast with a tenacious perseverance, and winds from the east summoned rain. Chill breaths of adventurous air rode out of the north. Along the whole wash of Gull Wing Island, with a temperamental nature that Sigurd himself never could possess, the waters of the lake complained, bellowed, thrashed obstinately, or sulked in a smother of green rollers and greasy swells. Day and night the blasts of the automatic fog signal—two long, one short, one long—two long, one short, one long—recited the perils of the coast. Out on the lake adventuring vessels answered its cry, or hooted their own alarms at one another, with the incivility born of brash weather and weary men.

Sigurd faithfully watched the fires that kept the blast going. Alone in the small, snug boiler room, apart from the house, he maintained steam and thought of Selma Peltier.

The white light shone each night with the punctuality of duty as duty is known along the edges of the seas. At the exact hour of sundown the beam flashed on, and at the hour of sunrise it flashed off again. All night Sigurd Carlson, coming to the door of the boiler room for air, could see its cold, constant eye glare out across the water through the encroaching, sightless fog.

Its gas lamp made a sleepy, hissing sound, which, if the wind was right, spread down from the tower like the drone of bees. It was not an unpleasant sound, and yet, after a time, Sigurd could scarcely endure to hear it. He felt the fear of a man in a nightmare who sees things dead spring up to life. It was more than human, this

flame that he tended. Fixed as the pole star, white as Jupiter, Gull Wing Light stood its lonely watches with a grave, commanding dignity, far above the niggling trivialities of men.

The soul of Olaf Carlson might dry up with bitterness. His son Sigurd might go or come. Mere men could never affect the destiny of a conscientious light.

The threats of storm held off. On Saturday a clear day broke, banishing mist from the coast and temper from the wind. That day the assistant keeper went ashore again, with his father's scornful parting words warm in his ears; nor did the seven miles of unstable water, nor the antics of his erratic catboat, jar away the memory of the grim old man.

He was sulky as a beaten mastiff when he clumped through the dust into Cedar Bridge; but he saw Selma Peltier hurrying away from the North Star Theater, and again his sun rose in its heaven. Her smile seemed brighter than usual. He felt ashamed of his own heaviness.

She was busy this afternoon. She could not meet him till five o'clock. Mr. Joyce? Yes, she supposed he was still at the theater. Sigurd would surely be on time? At the Cedar River House—at five exactly? Fine!

At supper Sigurd realized, with an embarrassment that was also pride, that Selma's slang was improving—no mean accomplishment there in the hills. She was gayer than usual. Openly and unashamed she kissed him twice before all the dining room.

"See Mr. Joyce?" she asked.

"Why, no." He could talk to no one without her help. "I wanted to plan it out with you first."

"Well, then, plan!"

She knew how to laugh! Sigurd ate his boiled supper and listened. He would always keep her laughing. He felt exhilarated, and at the same time ill at ease.

"When we're married," he explained shyly, "and we own the North Star, we'll run it three nights a week—Mondays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays; but we'll find some one else to play."

"Some one else?" Her face lost its laughter.

"Some one hired. It won't be so good, but you won't have to look at all those men. When you play it must be alone—for me."

She protested, amazed at his inability to understand.

"And lose a lot of money? Gee whiz, you're queer! Why, I'm the whole show! Mr. Joyce says fellows just come to hear me. He says they come to watch me."

"Not after I've bought."

She gave him her hand, and again was humoring.

"You really will buy?"

"Yes," he consented gravely. "I'll buy next month. We can be married then."

Abner Joyce was less cordial that evening, at Sigurd's second interview with him, affecting a severity that did not at all fit the loose contour of his mouth. Once he looked sharply over Sigurd's shoulder, and saw an almost imperceptible nod of Selma Peltier's head. He grimaced shrewdly.

"Well, I'm not aiming to sell," he lied; "but if you'll pay me the nine hundred cash, I'll take your note for the rest. Sure, I'll fix that up. Got the money with you? No? Well, I can wait two more weeks."

"Two weeks, anyhow," Sigurd agreed. "It might be more. I got to resign, get it accepted, and wait for a new assistant. Then I'll come."

He had been holding Selma's arm through all this, reaching back with awkward confidence. Now he pressed it firmly. Behind him she winced.

Abner Joyce offered his hand. Sigurd accepted it, shook it very gravely, and self-consciously followed Selma Peltier toward the front of the stuffy auditorium.

Once more he sat immobile through an enchanted evening. There would be many such enjoyments. Selma should play for him alone—play away his loneliness, cure that aching sickness which water and rocks and sand must have put into his soul. She might object, at first. In fact, he was quite certain she would. He was not intuitive, but he had sensed that much at supper. Selma would insist on playing at the North Star, and he would have to forbid it. She would obey. It did not occur to him to distrust that. Any distrust of Selma Peltier was unthinkable.

True, he had not liked the constant smirk that pinched the mouth of Abner Joyce; but men from outside places have outside ways, he decided, and that was all of that.

"I'm going over home to-night," he told Selma, after the performance. "I'll sail across easy in an hour—good west wind, and not too fresh. Want to write out my

resignation fit and proper. I'll pass it to the South Fox mail boat when they put in to-morrow."

They stood together at the edge of the village, before the door where he had left her one other night. Wind rustled the Lombardy poplars growing in two soldierly rows that flanked the road. The sky swam clear, with a racing moon.

"We'll be married in July—August, at any rate," he whispered. "I'll let my dad know it to-night."

"And set up till morning listening to what he's got to say about it!" Selma predicted. "Gee whiz, you'll be glad to get off of there! Once you talked a lot of big foolishness—wanted I should bring myself there along of you!"

He held her fiercely for a moment, unable to speak. The stars looked down, tolerant in their consummate wisdom, and took to themselves another secret to hold fast through eternity. Then he kissed her reverently, as a devout pilgrim kisses the pedestal of a holy image.

She ran jerkily up the walk. For a moment Sigurd lagged, his cap still off, his blond face aglow with pleasure.

The town behind him, he halted, confused, elated, conscious of the blood in his veins. Then he jogged on. Once more, at the hilltop, he hesitated and looked back upon the sleepy lights of Cedar Bridge. He felt a moment of supreme satisfaction, of intense, infrequent, sweet gayety. The night was his, and the road was his, and the world was his!

Alone with his illusions he tramped on toward the shore, his blunt, fearless heart softened by the mysterious, enchanting sorcery of the stars.

V

So often did Sigurd halt, and so long did he stand upon the road, that the night was very old when he came out upon the bluffs overlooking Lake Michigan. That inquisitive breeze which precedes the dawn had sprung to life and was running over the hills, rustling through groves of squat cedar trees. The lake argued against its beaches with a resonant, insistent voice.

Far to the right, white, austere, gleamed the unchanging eye of Gull Wing Light. It burned with an arch and solemn severity, as if it had endured from the beginnings of all time, as if the very stars had been lit from its flame, as if it would burn on, un-

fading, unceasing, into the last and blackest hour of eternity.

Sigurd saw it with a start. He had almost forgotten the light. He was still its servant. For two more weeks the duty to keep it burning rested on his father or on him. After that—

He felt a sore, hard lump in his throat, a peculiar and unhappy numbness in his knees. It was not fear, for what was there to be afraid of? It seemed, instead, that a chilling fog had settled abruptly upon his enthusiasm.

He climbed into his boat and sat down dispiritedly, without unlashing the tiller. It was still dark—much too dark to see the island; but there it lay. In the blackness Sigurd knew every line of its shore, the yellow knobs where its wings bent outward, the rocks on the tip, the sand, the water, the reeds. He hated Gull Wing Island!

Why had engineers built a tower on the sand? What uncanny power made such a structure endure? There it was, after sixty-nine years! Gull Wing Island might sink into the water, but Sigurd Carlson knew in his soul that its fixed white light would keep on burning. It would never cease to burn.

A spasm of disgust rushed through him. He was filled with revolt against the shaky, scratched films of the North Star Theater. He hated that man Joyce. He hated Cedar Bridge. He hated the island; but he couldn't hate the light.

The beam of the lighthouse showed no lack of faith. Never did it desert its devoted stewardship to wide seas and barren coast. What crazy plan was this of his? He, who was of a race of sailors and along-shore tenders to the exacting needs of sailing men!

For two hours he lay in his boat. He realized glumly that seven miles across the unruly water his father stood to duty, as faithful to that obligation as the light itself. At this moment old Olaf Carlson sat wakeful in the white kitchen of Gull Wing Light, in a debauchery of loneliness.

That was as it should be.

Was his father a better man than he? Sigurd threw the question at the merciless light. The light replied with a prolonged, unmoving stare.

Had any man been listening in the cedars above the lake that early morning, he would have heard a voice crying out:

"Selma! Selma, you devil! I love you,

Selma! Yes, in spite of that fishy Joyce! But I can't do it—not for all the music in the world, Selma—not for you!"

With unsteady feet Sigurd Carlson walked back to Hill's Pier. He suddenly felt old and tired, like an old, old man who has defeated many enemies.

The first omen of dawn hung on the eastern sky. Men were astir, and a few chimneys put out ambitious tufts of smoke. At the rear of the third house, which bore a sign of post office and store, and held in its window a clutter of boat tackle and gear, a woman squeaked a pump handle.

"I need to telephone," Sigurd said. "Cedar Bridge. Tell the operator there I want Selma Peltier. She'll find her."

The woman plugged into the shabby switchboard, ground a small crank, and clamped a headpiece across her ears. There followed a long wait.

"Here she is."

The woman retired through the kitchen, and once more squeaked the pump.

"Selma?" A pause. "Yes! You, Selma? That deal's off, Selma. Tell Joyce. That was all a mistake about the picture house. I'll not do it."

"Not do it?"

"No, never! But, Selma—the rest—let's not wait till July. We can be married right away. You can get fixed up real comfortable with me over on the island."

What was there to laugh at, he wondered? Why had she hung up with that short, jerky good-by? Well, no matter! He felt more at peace.

He ran down to the wash, pushed off his catboat, and made sail in a freshening wind.

The beam still showed clear on the island. While the last stars faded out, holding fast their secrets, and the east turned saffron, Gull Wing Light still burned, a beacon to guide sailors on a muggy horizon, and to beckon Sigurd Carlson back to the unflagging routine of his rightful home. Fixed white it blazed, unquenchable emblem of the Viking heart.

Sigurd hove over the tiller and squared his back on the frivolities of shore. He no longer felt old. Why should he, at twenty-one? A lifetime lay ahead. For many, many years he could give happily, here on this island or elsewhere, enduring, faithful servitude—for many, many years—an exacting servitude on the stark, inflexible coasts that push back intolerant seas.

The Sweet Restorer

THE PROFESSOR'S INVENTION WAS A DANGEROUS ONE, BUT
PERHAPS ITS RESULTS WERE NOT WHOLLY BAD

By John D. Swain

THE honorable gentleman from North Dakota had swung into the third day of his speech with a vitality amazing for a man well past sixty. His part in the filibuster demanded vitality rather than mentality. For the past two hours he had, indeed, been reading long passages from the "Lamentations of Jeremiah," as found in the Old Testament.

What relation these Biblical quotations bore to the subject of his oration, none of the handful of dozing Senators could have told. The president *pro tempore*, who was something of an authority on financial statistics and crossword puzzles, whiled away the time by estimating the cost of printing the speech in the *Congressional Record*, at twenty-seven cents per word; but his serenity was undisturbed, as his own fortune was safely invested in tax-exempt securities.

The gentle drone rather soothed him. Already his thoughts were releasing their clutch on reality, and winging their way into the domain of dreams, when he was jerked back to earth by the sudden cessation of sound. There are times when the cutting off of a noise to which our nerves have adjusted themselves is as disturbing as the shattering of a profound silence.

The glazed eyes of the president *pro tempore* focused. All over the chamber majestic heads upreared. The Senator from North Dakota had ceased to function. Slowly, like a stricken tree, he collapsed into his seat. His eyes closed, his head sagged forward on his breast. Something very like a snore issued from his parted lips.

A *confrère* shook his shoulder and spoke sharply in his ear. From opposite sides of the chamber rose two alert Senators. The president recognized one of the majority party. The great filibuster was broken!

Not at once did the significance of this event become evident. It seemed natural enough that outraged nature should have taken her toll. The gentleman from North Dakota had fallen asleep from sheer exhaustion, and without giving any previous indications of collapse. Not even when repeated shakings and the fumes of aromatic spirits failed to rouse him, and he was borne in a private ambulance to his hotel, did he get more than honorable mention in the evening papers.

Three days, a week passed, and he still slept. Not even his own constituents were unduly exercised when his physician announced that he seemed to be suffering from the mysterious sleeping sickness, which is originally contracted from a rather handsome green fly in Africa, but which may, in rare cases, be communicated to innocent persons who never saw Africa. The only really worried individual was the Senator's faithful old wife. She declared herself to be alarmed, yet she bore up wonderfully well.

The affairs of the nation moved tranquilly on. A daily average of six hundred laws and ordinances were added to the two million we already possess, of which the ordinary taxpayer has knowledge of some few score, although Helms, the statistician, asserts that a conscientious policeman needs to memorize no fewer than sixteen thousand. The rest we ignore, forget, or break.

Orators with silver or forked tongues continued to broadcast in agitation for new laws. From time to time a feeble voice was raised in favor of repealing a law which had become a dead letter at the time when Washington retired to Mount Vernon; but none was ever repealed. The national, State, and municipal presses rumbled on. The fat volumes of new enactments, obso-

lete before their ink was dry, gathered dust in more or less fireproof libraries; and the Senator from North Dakota slept on.

Already his name had disappeared from the newspapers, but presently it began to be featured in medical journals. Pathologists took a keen interest in his case; for it was recognized that the only point in which it resembled the dreaded sleeping sickness was that he still slept. There were none of the other characteristic symptoms—no loss of vitality, or of weight. In every respect he appeared to be a normal man who had fallen naturally into slumber.

Artificial feeding was not resorted to. The nurse simply raised his shoulders and fed him, with fork or spoon, the things they usually eat in North Dakota. Though his eyes remained closed, he masticated and swallowed, and seemed to relish his victuals.

It was evident that he dreamed. From time to time he talked in his sleep—shop talk, as one might put it. He demanded a roll call, or moved the previous question, or rose—figuratively—to a point of order.

His devoted wife seemed to grow younger week by week. The tired lines about her eyes and mouth disappeared. Her face took on a fresher, more youthful color. Out in North Dakota there was no talk of appointing a successor. Everybody seemed content, including the Senator himself.

II

THE second victim of this new variant of the sleeping sickness was more obscure, being, indeed, a humble commuter. He was stricken in the smoker, in the midst of his usual excellent health and spirits.

As the sleeping man was borne to the ambulance which had been telegraphed ahead for by the conductor, the stranger who had shared his seat was questioned by the police surgeon. The stranger recalled the precise words of the stricken man—seemingly trivial words, immediately after uttering which he had slumped down into his seat and commenced to snore. They were in the nature of a query, being a species of oratorical question.

"What's your line?" he had asked; and upon being answered, he had continued: "How many miles do you think I got out of my old bus, the other day, from a gallon of gas?"

The stranger was corroborated by another man who had occupied the seat just behind, and had overheard the brief con-

versation. There was nothing relevant about the remarks exchanged. They form, with the weather, one of the preliminary skirmishings whereby strangers classify one another, and are similar, though on the whole rather less intelligent, to the maneuvers of two strange dogs upon meeting.

So now the gentlemen of the medical profession had two cases for comparison. There were consultations and blood analyses; papers were read, theories were advanced, diagnoses were attempted.

From now on, the disease, if it was a disease, began to spread, though for some time it was confined to the Eastern seaboard, embracing a belt between Boston and Washington.

It is primarily the duty of physicians to collect data. In time, other physicians will eliminate the germ of truth from the mass of verified facts, though the original investigators may not live to see their labors crowned.

Very soon indeed the earnest men of science observed a curious fact, which might be significant, and might be a mere coincidence. Without exception, the victims were stricken while speaking. This led to a tentative theory that the germ—if it was a germ—was to be looked for in the throat or vocal chords; but nothing of importance resulted.

It was further noted that the victims belonged to no particular class, or race, or age. They embraced lusty young men and those of riper years and sedentary habits, men ignorant and learned, native and foreign-born, statesmen, golfers, radio fans, athletes, fishermen, students.

A cadaverous young Slav fell from the soap box on which he had been raving for two hours, attacking capitalism, religion, and marriage. He was snoring before his head hit the pavement.

That same day, in the same city, a famous banker, who was urging a reduction of the surtax before the Chamber of Commerce, was seen at the very instant of his peroration to yawn, close his eyes, struggle for an instant, and then relapse into a deep sleep, from which nothing could rouse him.

A clergyman dozed off into oblivion in the midst of his sermon. Even as the throng of worshipers left the church, a young man who but three years previously had captained his college football team fell asleep as he was relating to a friend the latest bright saying of his infant son.

A week passed, with no new cases reported; and then, in Chicago—a region hitherto immune—two victims were harvested in the same day and the same room.

A murder case was being tried. Dr. Kalbfleisch, the noted psychiatrist, was enlarging upon the significance of the discovery of a dead toad in the garden by a boy of eight, and his disastrous efforts to "project" it in his subconscious mind. Dr. Kalbfleisch was the first member of the medical profession to succumb to the new sleep.

That same afternoon the assistant prosecuting attorney passed out while reading a three-hundred-thousand word hypothetical question.

Another week passed, and then, in New York once more, a well dressed middle-aged man was discovered sound asleep in a telephone booth. With some difficulty the person whom he had rung up was discovered, but she asserted that his last remark had been of no significance whatever. She readily repeated the simple and natural question he had asked:

"What's the name in nine letters of an Australian bird that has no feathers?"

The following day an old gentleman fell irrevocably asleep in the club where he made his home, while repeating a conversation he had once had with James Gordon Bennett—a story with which all his fellow members had long been familiar.

III

In a small study in the White House three men were engaged in a momentous conference. At the head of a large flat-topped desk sat the President of the United States. On his right hand was James O'Rourke, head of our national Secret Service, and facing him was Dr. Paramount, from Johns Hopkins. The scientist was speaking.

"Mr. President, I will confess that we are still in the dark. We have been unable to rouse a single victim of this new form of sleeping sickness, but each is in excellent physical condition. Indeed, in most cases a marked improvement in pulse, respiration, and blood pressure, and even in appetite, has been noted. All attempts to classify our patients have been unavailing. They are drawn from both the educated and the ignorant, rich and poor, young and old, active and sedentary types."

"But they were all talking when they

checked out, weren't they?" asked O'Rourke. "That's what it says on the reports I've seen."

Dr. Paramount nodded.

"That is true; but the subjects of their discourses varied as widely as possible. So did their length. Men and women have been stricken in the midst of a long speech, or while uttering the briefest remark."

O'Rourke thought for a moment, then asked another question.

"Was any of them saying anything of importance?"

Paramount hesitated.

"Should you say that they were, Mr. President?"

"No," said the Chief Executive.

"Meanwhile," resumed the scientist, "our efforts will of course continue. In time we shall unquestionably conquer this baffling malady. The fact that our patients—all of whom are now in one ward, and under constant observation—continue to live, and even to thrive, so far as a sleeper may be said to thrive, is all in our favor. A few of us—including myself—are convinced that nefarious work is afoot; that there is at large some cunning man of abnormal mentality who by hypnotism, or by some kindred means, has succeeded in inducing in whomever he will a species of catalepsis. If so, Mr. O'Rourke is the one to track him down."

O'Rourke nodded.

"Sure, I'll get him—if he exists! You see, Mr. President, there's no telling who this bird will pick on next. He's nailed a lot of dumb-bells, but also he's rocked some pretty big men to sleep. Last week six more Senators flopped. As it happened, three were Democrats and three Republicans; but he might easily wipe out the party majority if he took it into his head. It is up to you, sir. Shall I go ahead?"

The President, his face impassive, considered for a moment or two before replying.

"Yes," he said.

A moment later the two visitors bowed themselves out and went their separate ways.

IV

SOME three weeks later O'Rourke sat facing a small, nervous man in a cheerless back room of an East Side lodging house. The tenant's long, nicotine-stained fingers played with his sparse, pointed gray beard,

twisting it into a little scraggly curl, and then untwisting it, only to repeat. His protuberant eyes fastened upon the stern face of the Secret Service chief like those of a lobster who senses that it is about to be boiled alive.

"H-how did you trace me?" he asked.

O'Rourke shrugged impatiently.

"Easily enough. Mere matter of patience—like running down a false entry in a set of books. I was sure that only one man was responsible, because there were no instances of two seizures taking place in different localities at the same time, and they all happened within a radius easy for a man to cover. Of course, I got a record of the people in the visitors' gallery at the time that first Senator passed out. The attendants are trained to remember faces. There were half a dozen strangers present, among them an undersized, ratty little guy with a goatee. When the second man was seized—the one in the smoking car—he was talking to a stranger who answered to the same general description. I couldn't prove that the little man with the goatee was present at all the places under investigation; but he was observed by a reporter at the Chicago trial, and an usher thought he had seated such a man in the church where the parson went under. It was routine work. Any of my men could have turned you up as easily; but there are reasons why I preferred to handle this case myself. By the way, I didn't come here to be questioned by you, Hertz, but to be *answered!* What's the big idea, anyhow? What are you—an anarchist?"

The little man agitatedly untwisted his wisp of a beard.

"Oh, no—not an anarchist—no, indeed! I am a philanthropist!"

"Uh-uh! Well, how'd you work it—hypnotism?"

"How can I explain? To comprehend, you would have to understand psychiatry, autosuggestion, telepathy, physiology, the latest atomic theories. It is really a matter of vibration frequency. Every one has a definite vibratory rate, you know. I had only to learn that of any given individual, and then to—er—broadcast, you would say, a similar vibration tuned in thirds and fifths—"

"Never mind," soothed O'Rourke. "The point is, you had to be present? I thought so! Now answer this—how many others know how to pull this stuff?"

The little man started, a faint color tingeing his pale cheeks.

"Not a soul, I assure you. I invented it myself."

O'Rourke nodded.

"I sort of figured it that way—hoped so, anyhow. Now, Hertz, listen to me. *This thing has got to stop.* It's too dangerous a power for any one man to control. I won't enlarge upon what you might do, if you were disposed to bust things up generally. Theoretically, you ought to be put to death."

Hertz shivered, his skinny form seeming to shrink so that his threadbare clothes hung upon him more loosely than ever. His voice sank to a bare murmur.

"Are—are you going to arrest me?" he timidly inquired.

"I am not," grunted O'Rourke. "That is, not unless I have to! The publicity would raise hell. Every near-scientist in the world would set out to learn how the trick's turned; and some of 'em would be sure to stumble on it, like you did. That's why I'm handling this thing personally. I've got a proposition to make to you."

He drew from his inside vest pocket a crisp parchment engraved in red-gold script.

"This is a government bond, par value ten thousand dollars. It's yours, when you have signed this agreement to discontinue, now and forever, any experiments in the production of artificial sleep, and not to impart what you have learned to any one, either by word of mouth or in writing; and mind you, you will be under constant espionage from now until the hour of your death!"

The shriveled hand of Professor Hertz reached forth for the fountain pen that O'Rourke produced.

"I'll sign!" he gasped.

And he did so at once, without reading the document.

"Well, that's that," remarked O'Rourke, rising and lighting a cigar in great good humor. "Remember now—no double crossing! At this very moment there lie, dead to the world, no less than eighty victims of your spells. They include, not counting the nobodies, more than forty Senators and Congressmen, a judge, a few district attorneys, several noted scientists, the president of the Anti-Nicotine League, two noted clergymen, a rear admiral, and—"

Hertz, who had been almost twisting his

goatee off in his eagerness, interrupted to say:

"*Mr. O'Rourke, I'll wake them all up!*
I, and I alone, know how to do it!"

The Secret Service chief gazed steadily into the protuberant eyes for a full moment. Then he turned his back to Hertz, and tiptoed to the door, which he flung suddenly open, to peer up and down the empty hall. Closing the door, he crossed the room and thrust his head out of the single window, after which he lowered the shade.

Returning to the wondering Hertz, he removed the cigar from his mouth, placed his lips close to the hairy ear of the little man, and whispered:

"That won't be at all necessary. You mustn't do it again, but as for these birds you've already worked on, my idea is to *let sleeping dogs lie!*"

With which he relighted his cigar, tiptoed once more to the door, opened it cautiously, and oozed out into the hall and down to the street.

Miss Marg'ret

EVEN THE HUMDRUM ROUTINE OF A BUSINESS OFFICE MAY HAVE ITS TRAGEDIES AND ITS ROMANCES

By Blanche Goodman

HE had been called just that at Sutton's for so many years that they forgot she had a surname.

"Miss Marg'ret, please look up that invoice on the Gresham shipment."

"Miss Marg'ret, did Taylor & Sons' remittance come in this morning?"

"Miss Marg'ret, take a letter, please."

She had been with the firm so long that she considered herself an integral part of the business, and felt justified in using the collective personal pronoun when referring to the house.

"We've just put in a new lighting system," she would announce at the boarding house table. "We're very busy at the office. We're doing twice the business we did this time last year."

Just as Miss Marg'ret had long since lost her surname, so the head of the firm was referred to by his employees simply as "Mr. S. J." There were also the two younger Suttons, Harvey and Will.

Miss Marg'ret's desk was in the inner office, near that of Mr. S. J. He had been very particular about her facing the wall so that the light from the street should fall over her left shoulder. Proper lighting angles, ventilation, and hygiene in general were fetishes with him.

Miss Marg'ret's position at the desk seemed to have cut her off, in a sense, from a view of the office; but this disadvantage was circumvented in a manner that had escaped Mr. S. J.'s notice. On the wall above her desk hung a framed map of the United States, one-half of which had been inked out in sepia, to indicate the benighted part of the country not yet acquainted with Sutton's cardboard products. This dark brown shadow of disapproval aided the glass that covered it to form a perfect reflector, which mirrored faithfully the movements of Mr. S. J., his sons, or the customers who dropped in. The tilted frame held a secret conspiracy between Miss Marg'ret and its sepia stain.

A younger and more attractive woman would have used this mirror to serve more personal ends. The opportunity was wasted on Miss Marg'ret, however. There was not the slightest touch of vanity about her. Primly neat she was, in a utilitarian sort of way that made no concessions to what is sometimes called "feminine lure." Thin, gray hair, brushed back severely from a high forehead; eyes of a pale, washed out blue, that stared at the world with a half quizzical, half astonished look; a nose and mouth that obtruded themselves on one's

notice no more than the bony promontories above her thin cheeks; a figure whose outlines were as austerely vertical as the pencils she kept neatly sharpened for use beside her writing pad.

When Mr. S. J. dictated to her, his gaze invariably rested upon a cornice of the office on the opposite side of the room; but she had long since ceased to notice this.

To-day an astounding thing had happened. Miss Marg'ret, pausing for a moment in her typing, and glancing up at the map to survey the office, experienced a shock. Mr. S. J. was sitting in his desk chair and gazing steadily at her.

It had been so long since his eyes had actually rested upon her that Miss Marg'ret dropped her glance as if she had been caught in some guilty act. A warm red crept up over her neck and past the hollows in her cheeks to the bare temples above. She quickly busied herself with her work again. Mechanically her fingers wrote:

Yours of the 15th inst. received. Regarding the shipment of boxes we wish to say—

Irrelevant thoughts were racing alongside those set phrases.

It was nearly a year now since Mr. S. J.'s invalid wife had died. He still wore a black band on his coat sleeve in token of his loss. His grief had been dignified and restrained, as beffited a man of his character. Perhaps, though, there were moments, even during business hours, when some thought of his loneliness obtruded itself.

To-day things had been rather slack at the office. The dull season was coming on. It gave him more time to think of his dead wife. His married sons had their own families, their own lives.

Thus Miss Marg'ret's thoughts ran on, but gradually her attention again became immersed in the contents of the letters she was typing. The incident passed out of her mind; but the next day the thing occurred again.

As on the day before, there was a personal directness in Mr. S. J.'s gaze that was unmistakable. Her face burned with the consciousness of this fact, and her hands trembled so that she could scarcely manipulate the keys before her. It was with a feeling of intense relief that she saw him rise suddenly, reach for his hat, and go out into the street.

That night, for the first time since girlhood, Miss Marg'ret stood before her bedroom mirror with an appraising eye. She had never deceived herself on the score of her looks. She did not attempt to deceive herself now. There was a mocking light of irony in her pale eyes.

"Fool," she whispered, "to dream of such a thing!"

And yet there was the fact, despite her self-mockery. Mr. S. J. had actually become aware of her. What is it, now—the word they use when a man and woman are thrown together day after day? A long word—pro—propinquity—yes, that was it! Perhaps the mere fact of her being a woman there in the office near him—

Well, you can never tell. A man feels lonely—especially a widower. Look at the case of old Mr. Shepherd and Miss Burton, his landlady. She was sixty, if she was a day.

Miss Marg'ret decided to do her hair in a less severe fashion. There were some kid curlers in her button box. They had lain there for years, ancient witnesses to a sporadic fit of vanity. She took them out now and rolled the thin wisps of hair above her forehead over the curlers. Then she looked shamefacedly at the knobsy little horns protruding from her temples.

From the shelf of her closet she took a flat pasteboard box. Opening it, she drew forth a cream-colored voile waist. A blue silk dot in the material added to its summery daintiness. She held it up with a dubious look. It was a radical departure from the dark, stern-looking waists she wore to work; but presently, after a moment of thought, she laid it carefully over the back of a chair, along with her neatly folded underthings and stockings.

II

WHEN Miss Marg'ret entered the office, at eight o'clock the next morning, Mr. S. J. was there, sorting out the mail. This was a rare occurrence. He practically never made his appearance before half past eight. The others had not come in yet.

Beside her surprised and confused greeting, his "Good morning, Miss Marg'ret," had a flat, impersonal sound. He might as well have addressed the wall paper. The flush of expectation on her thin cheeks died away. She went over to the office rack, took off her hat, and made ready for the day's work.

For a moment she had thought that Mr. S. J. was planning an opportunity to speak with her alone; but this, she soon decided, was only a foolish fancy. He had not even glanced in her direction when he spoke.

Her attention was suddenly drawn through and beyond the glass partition that separated the office from the outer store. Freddy Schimpf, the shipping clerk—he was still known as Freddy, despite his sixty odd years—was making motions in her direction that evidenced every shade of surprise and admiration. The instant after she had removed her hat, he had observed the fluffy little balustrade of hair that rose from her heretofore unadorned forehead. The cream-colored voile waist he had noted as she entered the outer door.

His gestures—Mr. S. J.'s back was turned toward him—evoked a slight frown in Miss Marg'ret's face, and she hastily averted her gaze.

"Miss Marg'ret!" It was Mr. S. J. speaking. "I—er—came in rather earlier than usual this morning."

The statement of this self-evident fact was accompanied by a certain embarrassment on his part.

"Yes, sir," she replied, and her tone did not betray the fluttering in her bosom.

"Well, to tell the truth, I came down early because"—he seemed to be nervously searching for just the right word—"I want to see you specially—"

The sharp peal of the telephone bell fell upon that sentence like a sword. To Miss Marg'ret there was something malignant in its sound. She turned mechanically to the hateful instrument.

"It's long distance," she said dully, handing the receiver over to Mr. S. J.

The message was from an important customer. By the time he had finished talking, some one else had come into the office. That opening talk, so cruelly interrupted, was as completely swallowed up in the morning's routine as if it had never been. At noon the firm's chief salesman came in from the West, and there was a long conference regarding market conditions.

The men went to lunch together, leaving Miss Marg'ret alone in the office.

Freddy Schimpf, on his way out, stopped for a moment.

"You look swell to-day, Miss Marg'ret! Couldn't help but notice how spruced up you are. Them blue dots becomes your eyes!"

He turned the color of a beet as he delivered himself of this compliment. Without waiting for her answer, he turned and went rapidly out of the door. Miss Marg'ret watched him as he went up the street. A smile that had in it something of pleasure and something of pitying condescension hovered about her mouth.

When she was sure of being alone, she opened a drawer in her desk, reached back into its farthest corner, and took out a small mirror and a powder puff.

Her lunch hour came when Mr. S. J. or one of his sons returned from the little restaurant up the street.

She sat back luxuriously now, free to occupy herself with her own concerns. Her mind's eye dwelt upon the person of her employer—a portrait so complete that Mr. S. J. in the flesh could add no further touches to enrich that inner vision.

A tall figure slightly stooped, and growing a bit corpulent with the years; a face lightly bearded, the beard, with his graying hair, blending with the pepper and salt business suit he wore. There was a kindly, absent-minded air about him. His somewhat nearsighted brown eyes somehow gave one a sense of security regarding life. The world had used him rather well. He was a respected figure in the community, the master of considerable wealth, and the father of two sons who were a credit to the house of Sutton.

Miss Marg'ret's thoughts were in a hazy glow. The future held boundless possibilities for her. What was that article she had read about the ideal wife understanding the business as well as the domestic side of a man's life? Thirty years of daily association had given her a thorough insight into the one. Surely she could do as well on the domestic side!

Sooner or later Mr. S. J. would resume that interrupted talk. He was not a man to be thwarted by a mere telephone call.

III

THE voile waist and the frizzed hair were augmented, the next day, by a brooch of dull gold and an old-fashioned bracelet, once her mother's.

She had also purchased some pink nail powder, and by dint of much buffing had achieved for her finger nails a glassy surface that made her homely, capable hands look rather ridiculous. There were other additions, other changes. By the end of

the week she was the sole topic of discussion at the boarding house.

"She's come into money," one of the women ventured. "Unless," she added, as a remote possibility, "she has a beau!"

Down at Sutton's, Freddy Schimpf made furtive attempts to chat with her. She mused on this. Strange how things never come singly! It was true, reflected Miss Marg'ret, of the pleasant things as well as the unpleasant.

It was nearing noon on Saturday when Mr. S. J. came over to her desk with a letter requiring special instructions. Harvey, the elder son, had gone over to their lawyer's office, to see about a claim in regard to a missing shipment. Will, the younger son, was in the outer office, preparing to go home.

The instructions were given, and yet Mr. S. J. made no move to go. She sent a timid glance up at him.

"Miss Marg'ret," he began haltingly, "I—ah—I've been intending to see you—to speak to you personally—about a matter that I—"

He paused. She wondered if her heartbeats were audible. Her gaze was bent upon the papers before her, and her hands were fluttering among them, as she made a pretense of straightening them out.

"It's rather difficult to talk during business hours." His tone was more confident. "Would you mind staying on after the others have gone?"

She inclined her head by way of answer, her hands still fluttering among the papers.

"Ah—thank you!"

Mr. S. J. walked over to his desk, closed the top with a brisk air, and took his hat; and presently the office door closed upon him.

Miss Marg'ret sat motionless. At that moment one would almost have been justified in calling her pretty. The triumphant glow of joy that irradiated her seemed to light up her entire being like a flame. Her eyes took on a deeper hue; her cheeks glowed pink, and her nondescript mouth, touched with the happiness of anticipation, took on unaccustomed curves. Her vista of dreams widened—widened incredibly.

It was in this mood that the office boy from the firm overhead found her. The young woman at the switchboard on the third floor was suffering with a bad tooth. She had sent him down to ask Miss Marg'-

ret to take her place at the board until the tooth could be attended to.

Miss Marg'ret had been a switchboard operator in former days. She rose from her chair to comply, the beatific smile still hovering over her lips.

On Saturday the elevator stopped running at noon. Miss Marg'ret climbed to the third floor as lightly as did the boy beside her. Somehow everything had suddenly become endowed with wings.

When she reached the switchboard, the plight of the girl who sat before it was evident to even a casual observer. Her plump, good-natured face was distorted with pain. Miss Marg'ret did not wait for explanations, but waved her out of the chair and clamped the earpieces on her own head, while the sufferer gratefully took a rapid departure.

For ten or fifteen minutes Miss Marg'ret sat making connections in a purely automatic way, her inner mind busy with its rosy plans. Suddenly a familiar voice jerked her attention to her work.

"Belmont 4375?" The number was that of Sutton's office, and the voice that of Harvey Sutton, calling up from an outside telephone.

"Yes! That you, Harvey?"

This was Mr. S. J., answering.

"Yes, dad. You alone?"

"Well—er—that is, yes. Miss Marg'ret left a note on her desk, saying that she'll be in shortly."

"Oh, I see! Then you haven't said anything yet?"

"Not yet, Harvey. I asked her to come back after lunch, so that I could speak to her." There was a pause. "I tell you, Harvey, it's the hardest thing I ever had to do."

"Yes, but you can't keep her on, dad. This week alone she's made three mistakes in transcribing figures. It makes me a lot of trouble. You'll have to let her out and get a younger one!"

"Gosh, Harvey, it's like pulling teeth to fire her after all these years! Hello! Hello! Don't cut us off, operator! Hello!"

"All right, dad! I hear you now."

"Did you hear that noise, Harvey? Sounded as if a ton of bricks fell on the wire."

"It's a lot better now." The blond switchboard operator had returned to her post, and was taking the earpieces from

Miss Marg'ret. "You're a peach to help me out!" She seated herself in her accustomed place. "I'll do the same for you some day," she added gratefully, and then: "My Gawd, how pale you look!" Her round face was all distress. "Feel sick?"

"I—I think the heat up here got me," murmured Miss Marg'ret. "It's—a little close. Be all right in a minute."

She made for the stairway up which she had gone so lightly a brief while ago. Her legs seemed unwilling to bear her.

"Don't you want a drink of water or something?" called the girl in the chair.

Miss Marg'ret shook her head wanly, and went slowly down the steps. Reaching the bottom, she stood for a moment in the dimly lighted rear hallway before returning to the office where her employer awaited her. Footsteps were approaching from an

adjoining corridor. Miss Marg'ret, turning, discerned a familiar figure.

"Why, Miss Marg'ret!" Freddy Schimpf stood beside her. "You're—you're not—there's nothing wrong, is there?"

There was deep anxiety in his rather squeaky voice as his gaze fastened itself on her dejected figure.

"It's nothing," she assured him. "Just a little faintness from the heat. All right now!"

She threw him a brave look, her head held high. Freddy came a step closer. Shyness was apparent in his manner and in his honest gray eyes.

"Say, I'm glad I run into you here," he told her. "They guy a feller so in there!" He jerked his head toward Sutton's. "Been wanting to ask you if you'd go to the movies with me this evening."

THE ETERNAL SPRING

SPRING will come with many a bright, fair thing,
 As down the ages—
 Blossoms and birds, as long ago was sung
 In old dead poets' pages,
 Keeping their verse forever sadly young;
 But spring can bring
 No loveliness like you,
 Nor face, nor voice, nor radiance wet with dew,
 Nor aught that can compare
 In whiteness with your breast, in fragrance with your hair.

Your kiss all violets are,
 Your eyes all mirrored water
 Bathed in by the young star
 That is the morning's daughter;
 Your voice all music witched and wandering
 That echoes through the hollow halls of spring.
 The silver birches, maiden in the breeze,
 Are but your white limbs in an imagery,
 As all are imageries,
 Shadows and dreams of what the world would be,
 Vainly essaying your reality.

So have I care no more of April or May,
 Or how the seasons fleet upon their way;
 I fear no winter, nor the spring pursue,
 Or heed if dogwood blooms or the wild rose,
 That have all spring forever locked in you—
 All in the ivory casket of one girl,
 As in one amethyst the whole sea's blue,
 And all its dreaming sorrow in one pearl!

Richard Le Gallienne

Thicker than Water

THE STORY OF A STRANGE HOME-COMING AFTER MANY YEARS

By Myron Brinig

MARY FULLER came to Montana in the days of glorious excitement when copper and silver were first discovered. With her husband and their two children, she lived in a log cabin behind Big Butte Hill; but it seemed that Lady Luck made eyes at every prospector but Tim Fuller. After five years of constant seeking he had not hit a pay streak, and he was discouraged.

Silver Bow County was thronged with men who wanted to get rich quick. Competition became keen, and the most valuable claims fell into the hands of a fortunate few, who became enormously rich and drove around in shiny patent-leather buggies, princes of the realm.

For a time Tim Fuller worked for one of these rich prospectors, who controlled one-third of the magnificent, copper-veined hill that lorded it over the surrounding country. Tim had not come out to Montana just to be a "mucker" for somebody else. He took his ill luck to heart, and spent most of his leisure time brooding over the Copper City Bar.

One evening he came home with a new prospector's outfit—a shiny pick and shovel, a pan, a sack of provisions, and a mule.

"I'm goin' to try my luck over by Helena," he said. "They've just discovered gold over there. I won't be back till I'm rich!"

His young wife looked at him out of large, wistful eyes. She knew that it would be worse than useless to argue with him. His discovery of Eldorado had too long been postponed. He was a desperate man gambling in futures.

"I'll take Ben along with me," continued Tim Fuller.

Ben was the eldest child, nearly five years old. He had accompanied his father

on prospecting trips ever since he had been big enough to toddle along. The younger boy, David, was still in the cradle.

Mary Fuller did not stop to debate the problem even though she felt part of her life going away with these two. If Tim wanted his son with him, there was nothing to do but let the child go. It was a good thing that Ben was a self-assertive lad, vigorous and active of limb, with an independent nature. Maturity fairly leaps upon one in the wilderness.

"He'll need some clean clothes," said his mother.

Mary set about washing everything that the boy owned. She bent over the tub and scrubbed on the washboard until her knuckles were sore and her hands were like great lumps of veal. Then she ironed out the lad's shirts and trousers and underthings, dried them, and packed them neatly in a bundle, to be tied on the mule.

Meanwhile Tim had dusted and polished the violin that he used to play back in Ohio, before he had contracted the gold fever. Nowadays his mind was too much occupied with other things to bother about music.

"You might play me something before you go," volunteered Mary timidly, drying her hands on her apron.

She stood in the doorway, watching her husband make room for the violin case in one of the packs. He hesitated for a minute, and stood motionless, as if struck with pity for the woman he was leaving behind; but he was not a demonstrative man, in spite of the musical streak in him, and sentiment made him awkward and foolish. Just now he was inclined to go to the other extreme.

"Aw, I'm too busy to fool around playin'," he answered gruffly.

Preparations for the departure were soon

completed. Man and child were dressed for the long trail ahead of them. The mule stood in the roadway, heavily loaded down, with dispirited, inscrutable eyes. It was plain to see that Tim would not find it easy to drive such a stubborn-looking beast.

Behind the cabin the great red disk of the sun melted into the blazing horizon, and its torchlike beams lighted the whole sweep of the country below into a copper conflagration. Mary went into the house to fetch the baby from the cradle. It was a pity to wake little David, but it might be a long while before he would see his father and brother again.

He wept furiously at being snatched from his placid, lovely dreams. His mother attempted to soothe him, drawing his hair back from his eyes and kissing his fat, rosy cheeks; but he only wept the more, and it was not until she gave him to his elder brother that he grew quiet and looked out of wide, incredulous eyes at the mule standing in the roadway.

The father called that he was ready to start, and Ben gave the baby back to his mother.

"Well," said Tim, looking at his wife, "I'm goin' now. I'll try to be back in a month."

He approached her awkwardly, and kissed her cheek. She seemed unwilling to let him go, but he released himself abruptly and turned away.

Ben, too, was impatient, and struggled to be free when his mother held him tightly. He did not understand why there should be so much kissing. He wanted to be striding along by the side of his father, who was a great adventurer. They would be men together. They would have a strenuous, exciting time of it climbing mountains and descending to swift, singing streams. His father had two guns, and they would shoot birds and gophers—perhaps even elk and deer.

The shadows of the mountains, giants on stilts, thundered grandly down the ravines into the town, driving the retreating daylight before them. Mary Fuller, holding her youngest son close to her breast, shaded her eyes with a free hand and peered sharply down the road, where her husband and son were disappearing. She saw them stop for a moment, while Tim drew something out of one of the packs. Mary wondered what it could be. The idea entered her mind that they might have

forgotten something, and were returning for it. She would have so much more of them before they were finally gone.

But they were not coming back. Tim had opened his violin case, and had placed the fiddle under his chin. Ben led the mule, and Mary heard the first faint notes of a familiar, painfully sweet melody.

It was the same tune that he had played when he first came to woo her back in Ohio. It was like yesterday; and here she was, standing in the doorway and watching them go down the road—a poet whose only voice was his fiddle, and a poet's son leading a mule.

It was just like Tim to wait until they were on their way before playing his violin. He was ashamed of showing his love now after seven years. She knew that he was playing for her, just as he had played before they were married. She wanted to tell him that she knew.

Once he turned his head for an instant.

"Good-by!" she called in a tense, strangled voice, waving her hand.

Tim lifted his fiddle high in the air to answer her call, like a romantic gypsy. Then he tucked it under his chin again.

The melody grew fainter; boy, man, and beast disappeared around a turn; and the road was deserted. Darkness held the land in thrall; but now that the sun had drawn his trailing robes of fire off the floor of the sky, the moon had a chance to show his softer, finer glow.

Mary stood looking at the moon for a time, while the babe in her arms pulled at her hair. It was an audacious game to little David, and he gurgled with delight. Presently she returned within the cabin, lit the kerosene lamp, and placed it in the window. When they returned, her husband and son, they would know that she was waiting for them.

II

SIXTEEN years later the lamp was still there. It burned with an amber tranquillity through the cool curtain of the night, lighting the way for every traveler but the right one. Tim Fuller and his son had never returned to the cabin behind Big Butte Hill. They had disappeared into the mountains, swallowed up in the jaws of that army of kingly lions crouching against the sky. Mary had lost hope that they would ever return; but the lamp was a sort of sacred trust that she could not dim.

Waiting and poverty had whitened her hair and shriveled her frame, but there was a curious, unexpected strength in her that seemed detached from her body. During the first few years, after Tim ceased to send her money, she cultivated a garden in the rear of the cabin, raising potatoes and peas, onions and parsley. It was difficult to grow anything in the sulphur-choked air of Silver Bow, and the garden required constant tending and toil. In addition, she went about from house to house in the town, collecting laundry. The pioneers favored her over the Chinese, whose wash always smelled a little of opium. Mary's laundry was as white and cool as snow, and smelled as fresh and clean as the winds.

When David reached his fifteenth year, it was no longer necessary for his mother to be the breadwinner of the family. The sheriff of Silver Bow County appointed David driver of the stage between Silver Bow and Washoe, a distance of thirty miles. This was the express stage, and did not take passengers. The route was winding and rugged, up and down the steep mountains that rose hundreds of feet and dropped swiftly into Deer Lodge Valley.

David did not play the fiddle, as his father had done. His music was the thousand airy gesturings of the tall grasses and the tinkling *obbligato* of the mountain streams. He drove between the rows of pines standing at soldierly salute under the warming banner of the sun.

It was a man's work, and David was a man in everything but years. He was tall and muscular, with heavy black hair that had a habit of tumbling over his eyes, so that one of his mannerisms was to brush his unruly mane back from his forehead with a free, upward sweep of his whole arm. He stood five feet ten in his stocking feet, and he could have carried his mother on his shoulder without feeling the least strain.

It was the first time in the history of Silver Bow County that so young a boy had been selected to drive the express stage, but David Fuller was chosen for a number of excellent reasons. He was an expert handler of horses—the more of them the merrier. His knowledge of the surrounding country was thorough.

"He could drive the whole way with a bandage over his eyes," some one said of him.

Moreover, he was strong and fearless.

He knew what to do in an emergency, and he shot dead to the mark. The last reason, though it would not otherwise have held any weight, was that he supported his mother. Every one in the county knew how, years before, she had been left by her husband and elder son.

David started his daily trip in the morning, and his labors were not done until close upon midnight. For one of weaker fiber and less imagination, the long hours of driving would have been a great strain and a hardship; but the boy loved his work. It was an exciting game, to him, rather than a job—a game that took him around the world in twelve hours. He felt the trust placed in him by the mining companies who shipped their pay rolls and valuables by his stage. It was a trust that matured him before his time, and lifted him to the rarest pinnacles of his swift, impetuous existence.

Often, on days when the express was light, David would get some one to drive in his place, while he and his mother would go out into the woods, tramping together. Sometimes he would lie flat on his back, looking up at the sky, while she would read him stories from the "Arabian Nights"—tales of magic lamps, desert caravans, and all the colorful conglomeration of the East.

Mary Fuller would not believe that her son was grown up, though he towered above her, and was regarded by others in the community as a youth of unusual attainments. There was a rare communion of spirit between the two—a bond that had grown stronger than it would normally have been if Tim Fuller had never gone away. Ever since her husband and her elder son had disappeared, Mary had lavished all her love and care on this great baby of hers. She called him "Davy," and she was "old lady" to him—not that she was so old, but because the term was an endearment that slipped naturally from his lips.

"My old lady," he told his friends, "could drive the stage, if I was sick. My old lady is a great one for readin' stories to me about Chinks with long cues kneelin' before Buddhas with emeralds for eyes."

There was a time for these fairy imaginings; but when he was driving treasures of hardly less value in his own stage, David's face wore a grim, serious expression, and his eyes never for a moment closed. He knew the temper of the country, in which law was still merely a term, holdups were

almost a daily occurrence, and murders were not few and far between. With his own eyes he had seen outlaws hanging limply from the cottonwoods, lone, dangling bodies that had once explored the far reaches of dangerous romance.

He rarely appeared at the cabin later than midnight. He was due back from Washoe at eleven o'clock, and it took him about an hour to deliver the express and stable his horses.

One night, in the early spring, he had not returned at the usual time, and Mary Fuller paced the floor nervously, torn by a fury of anxiety. He had had to bring a sack of gold dust from the new company claim at Phillipsburg into Silver Bow; and it was not beyond the bounds of possibility that he had been held up, and perhaps—but she could not bear to think of that perhaps.

The "old lady" had within her a tremendous reserve of strength and will, though to one who did not know her she might look helpless enough. At half past twelve she reached for the rifle that hung over the fireplace, and, buckling on her cartridge belt, she started down the road in the direction from which her son drove into town.

She was inclosed about by the sharp-scented pines, perpetual comrades of the higher altitudes. Before her loomed the mountains, seeming so close that she could touch them if she stretched out a hand; yet they were miles removed. That was the way of the mountains—near, yet so far, like Tim Fuller and her lost son.

But she was thinking only of David as she moved along the road. He represented the culmination of all that she had lived for, her life, her very soul. Without him she was just a lonely old woman, without a single plan, holding no place in the vivid life that throbbed about her.

When she had walked four miles she recognized before her the silent and formless outline of the stage, a wrecked ship left alone to drift in the immovable ocean of night. There was a wretched interval when Mary Fuller stood in the middle of the road, with one hand over her heart, dreading to approach that phantom of uncertainty. It might be the end of all things for her—the terrible, bleak finality.

Summoning her will to her aid, she started forward and caught at the horses' bridles, to steady herself in preparation for

the sight which might slay her in a moment. She told herself that she must bear up under whatever blow might strike her; and presently she was clambering up into the driver's seat, where her son lay stretched out, his face strangely pale under the stars.

"Is that you, mother?" he asked feebly.

She cried out with happiness, lifted him up beside her, and passed eager hands over his face.

"What is it?" she whispered tensely. "What's happened, Davy?"

Even as she spoke, she could feel the blood on his face, dreadfully warm to the touch.

"Had a little party," he murmured. "It was lucky for me that there was only one. I plugged him, too; but he got away. He thought he was goin' to get my gold, but I showed him! I guess I'm like *Aladdin* and his wonderful lamp. My life must be enchanted!"

"Are you badly hurt?" she asked, stamping down the weakness that threatened to drive her into hysteria. She had quickly lifted her dress and torn off part of her petticoat with which to bandage his wound. "Davy, tell me you're not badly hurt, because, if you are—"

"It's just a scratch. Don't worry, mother. It was lucky for me that the son of a gun was a poor shot, else maybe I wouldn't be here talkin' to you."

He laughed softly at his own words, as if the idea of death was entrancing, rather than fearful.

She was amazed at his light tone.

"Don't talk that way, Davy! I can't stand it!"

She lifted his head into her lap, and drew back his long hair from the wound. She kissed his mouth, attempting to transfuse her strength into him. She was thinking that if she lost him, death would come to her quickly, and it would be a merciful end.

"Do you think you could sit up, Davy? I'll drive you home."

When he told her that he could, she carefully placed his head on her shoulder, and, holding the reins tightly, she drove the rest of the way into town. The cool air that sang past his ears revived David, and by the time they reached the cabin he was relating his experience with gusto and pride.

"They won't bother me again," he said. "They know they're not dealin' with any

kid. I'll give them bullet for bullet, and if they want a rough and tumble fight, well, I'm ready for 'em!"

He spoke in a spirit of boyish bravado. There was about him the exaltation of having passed through fire without being burned.

"That fellow's lucky if he's got a leg left! I fired, and I heard him holler, 'Ouch! You hit me!' Mother, I'm tellin' you he squealed like a pig. I felt kind of sorry for the critter."

She attempted to help David down from the seat, but he smilingly dodged her endeavor. He would not go to bed, saying that he felt well enough to drive the stage into Kingdom Come, if called upon, this very minute. He paced to and fro across the room, waving his hands and speaking rapidly, his face rosy with excitement.

"If only dad and brother was here, wouldn't they feel proud of me?" he asked suddenly.

"Go to bed, Davy," she implored him. "I'll ask the sheriff to get some one in your place for to-morrow."

"Huh?" He wheeled upon her impatiently. "Get somebody in my place? What's the matter with me, I'd like to know? I'm ready to go back to work first thing in the mornin'. Why, mother, what makes you talk that way? You'd think I was hurt or somethin'. When I have to be carried into this room, you'll know there's somethin' the matter with me!"

She clasped him about the shoulders, eager to reason with him, but he broke free from her embrace.

"Fine stage driver I'd be, to give up my job with a little scratch on my face!" He tore the bandage off his head and flung it away, as if it were a badge of shame. "I don't want the old thing!" he called out. "I'm goin' to see the sheriff myself, and give him a report."

Before his mother could stop him he was outside the cabin, and she could hear him impatiently urging the horses down the road.

She went to the doorway, to see the rear of the stage disappear from view. The moon, sailing out with a rounded whiteness from under a hood of clouds, lit up her face, revealing lines of deep anxiety and longing. So, sixteen years before, she had stood in the selfsame doorway watching her husband and son pass out of her life—or would they ever return?

For an hour she stood without moving an inch; and at the end of that time she saw her boy returning, walking with the free, impetuous stride that showed his strength and his finely modeled form. She saw how, from time to time, he lifted his arm and brushed back from his forehead the heavy black hair that fell over his eyes.

"Ain't you in bed yet, mother?" he asked, and led her inside the cabin. "I told sheriff, and he's got his deputies out in the mountains, lookin' for the dirty thief. He wants to put Cliff Hawkins to ride with me on the stage from now on, but I told him I can take care of myself, right enough!"

"But you ought to have somebody alongside of you," she pleaded. "After all, Davy, you're only a child. Seventeen—what's that?"

But he would not listen, though he suffered her to wash his wound and bandage it over again. With a start that sent sharp chills through her limbs, she reflected that if the bullet had gone the least bit to the right, David would not be alive now. Her hands trembled for a moment; but his smile reassured her, and soon he was in bed sleeping soundly.

His mother bent over him, lifted the hair out of his eyes, and kissed him. He turned his head away, in his slumber, as if ashamed of being treated like a baby. To Mary Fuller he was a baby. He was her son, whom she would keep by her side, whatever might happen. She was determined that life should not rob her again.

She passed out of his room; and, as had been her custom for so long, she placed the kerosene lamp in the window, a beacon of hope to the wanderers who had gone and who might some day return.

III

NOTHING was heard of the highwayman who had stepped out of the night, with murderous intent, to fire at Mary Fuller's son. He vanished, and left not a trace behind. How he had managed to drag himself to safety was a miracle that no one could explain.

On the morning after the attempted holdup David was back at his job, fresh and intrepid. As the months flew by, he treated the incident lightly, as a minor adventure that was bound to occur in the life of every man who drives a stage through the wild mountain passes.

All seasons were alike to David. Weather held no terrors for him. Rain or snow, he sat there in his high seat, a throbbing, appealing figure, a god in the eyes of the children who waved to him as he dashed at full speed through the small camps along his route.

With both hands holding the reins strongly, and his feet planted firmly on the dashboard, he was like one of those messengers who sped over the land in ancient times, bearing the news of victory or defeat to the grandeur that was Greece or the glory that was Rome. He was a god of war, with his big eyes blazing. He was a god of swiftness, rushing along through the scintillant air, his black hair floating behind him.

His arms, bare to the shoulders, were sturdy and brown, lithe with muscle, and tingling with the breezes that swept them. When he leaped from his seat at the end of the journey, he drew about him, like a magnet, a crowd of admiring spectators, who passed jokes with him and slapped him on the back good-naturedly. He was their sign that all was well with the world. He was their clock, their barometer.

Riding into town full tilt, with his eyes full of laughter and his white teeth gleaming in sharp contrast to the bronze of his face, David could not help but bring smiles to the faces of all who saw him pass. If, on the other hand, something along the route had displeased him—if a wheel had come off, or one of the horses had lost a shoe—his scowl was a certain indication that all was not well with the world. The sky took on a shade of darkness through which not even the brightest, hottest sun could break. Jokes died on the lips of those who would have uttered them hoping for an answering laugh from his gay young face.

The pay roll of the mines grew larger as the companies developed their rich properties. There was talk of a railroad, and David, hearing the rumor for the first time, was cast into deep dejection. Nevertheless, the day's work was sufficient to obliterate all thoughts of an unhappy future—the day's work that was so full of throbbing, thrilling life and activity!

The time came when, despite his protest that he could take care of himself and of the trust disposed in him, David had to take a companion on the driver's seat. Cliff Hawkins, a much older man, who combined

the qualities of watchman and assistant, was chosen for the job. With their increased pay rolls, the mining companies felt the need of greater safeguards. The wonder was that the stage had been so immune from holdups since David had taken charge. Did this youth lead an enchanted life, like one of those fairy princes about whom his mother had so often read to him?

No, he was only human. There was enchantment in him, but no magic could altogether shield his brave spirit from attack. There came a night when Cliff Hawkins, cursing and weeping alternately, brought the boy back to his mother, unconscious, with his forehead dreadfully scarred by a bullet wound.

The whole day had been one of waiting for her—waiting intermingled with a curious premonition of disaster. When Cliff carried David into the cabin, struck down, broken, she gazed at her son with unbelieving eyes. Could the son whom she had known, so fearless in his courage, so gay in his humor, be this bleeding casualty? She sprang to the side of her unconscious boy with a wild cry of despair, and carried him in her arms to the bed.

When the doctor arrived, she would not be moved from her son's side, and it was dawn before they could drag her away.

"Who did it?" she moaned over and over again. "Who did this to my boy?"

Cliff Hawkins told his story for the third or fourth time.

"I couldn't see them," he said. "There was two big fellows with masks on their faces, an' when Davy wouldn't give up the pay roll, they opened fire. I ducked in the nick of time, an' gave them some of my lead; but Davy, he was sort of took by surprise, an' they plugged him, but they didn't get any of the money. What I say is, hangin's too good for 'em!"

"Will he be all right—my boy?" Mary Fuller asked the doctor.

He reached for her hand and patted it consolingly.

"We'll hope for the best," he murmured. "It's hard to tell now, but if he lives through the day he'll be all right. I'm being honest with you, mother, because I know you wouldn't want me to lie. He's got a heap of fighting to do yet, but he'll fight, or I don't know him!"

"If he lives through the day!" repeated David's mother in a toneless voice.

She looked down at her son, his face

white and drawn, his beautiful eyes closed to all ecstatic colors and images, and her mouth tightened until her lips were blue. She moved away from the side of the bed, as if impelled by some unseen, unrealized force, and withdrew to an inner room. After a few minutes she was back again, dressed for riding, holding a rifle and a coil of rope. She inspected her gun carefully, and fixed the cartridge belt around her waist.

"Why, what are you going to do, mother?" the doctor asked in surprise.

"Somewhere out there, free, is the man who shot my boy," she said grimly. "I'm going to bring him back!"

Without another word she stepped out of the door and strode down the road. It seemed odd that such a little lady, full of the milk of human kindness, could look so determined, so harsh. Every trace of patience and submissiveness had left her. She looked an avenging figure, an inevitable messenger of justice.

IV

At the sheriff's office David's mother learned that the sheriff and his deputies had already started toward Washoe, in search of the bandits. They had taken the main road; but Mary Fuller, trusting to some keen intuition within her, took a trail that led in an opposite direction, through the wildest part of the surrounding country. She had secured a pony, and her rope hung by the side of her saddle.

She rode all that day, keeping as closely as possible in the shadow of the cliffs. Mounting steadily up the trail that led to the Continental Divide, her eyes were constantly open and alert, eager for some sign to indicate that she had chosen the right direction. At last, in the first dimness of evening, she saw ahead of her, perhaps a quarter of a mile away, a horse tied to a tree, and, sprawled near by, a man, apparently asleep.

Her first impulse was to creep toward him, and to shoot to kill before he could defend himself; but on more sober reflection she decided to bide her time. She knew well the ways of the lawless country in which she had lived for so long. It might well be that the man was only shamming slumber, that he was aware of her approach out of one opened eye. As long as he was in sight and alone, she was complete master of the situation. She was con-

tent, for the time, to play the game of watchful waiting.

After an interval of sharp observation, her feeling that he was not asleep was verified. He leaped up from his reclining position, as if some instinct told him that he was being followed. Climbing to the top of a rock that jutted out of the earth, he looked all about, shading his eyes.

David's mother waited breathless behind a tree, gripping the butt of her rifle tensely. The bandit must have felt that he was safe, for he returned to his horse, and, mounting easily into the saddle, proceeded in his flight. After a few minutes the avenger followed him.

In the darkness she lost him for a time; but she knew that he was not far off—probably behind the first fortress of hills, preparing his supper. The night air had grown chill, and diamondlike particles of frost glittered sharply on the earth. It was becoming more and more difficult to manage the pony, for the trail was narrow, and descended steeply from the divide into Jefferson Valley.

All about her were the sounds and scents of a world that is free to the end of all time, knowing no master and few tenants. The sighing of the wind through the pines and the wild music of unfettered streams made a dramatic rhapsody of the night; but Mary Fuller's ears were attuned to only one sound—that of a guilty man fleeing from crime.

Reaching the bottom of the descent, she lifted herself from the saddle and stood in a forest of spruce trees. She groped her way to the edge of the wooded area, leading her pony after her, and confronted a series of low hills that looked as if they had been crushed into pygmies by the terrific force of the sky. In the narrow, miniature cañon that separated one knoll from its neighbor, the bandit had audaciously started a fire. His pursuer beheld the smoke, like the floating veil of a novice taking her vows, rising to the tops of the hills.

She tied her pony to a stump and proceeded forward like an animal, her hands touching the ground before her. Closer and closer she approached her man, until she could see him resting on one elbow before the fire, with his back to her.

"Put 'em up!" she commanded sharply.

The man rose as one electrified, and backed away out of the light, as if fearing instant death. She approached him warily,

ly, her finger touching the spring of her rifle with a dangerous delicacy. Within a few feet of where he stood she halted, and he realized for the first time that his captor was a woman.

He regarded her out of incredulous eyes. Then, as the situation impressed itself upon him, he appeared less tense, and even smiled wanly.

"Don't make a move, or I'll kill you!" she warned him. There was no softness in her voice. "Hand 'em over!" she ordered.

He threw his weapons at her feet. For a highwayman facing death, he appeared unconcerned, even listless.

After she had disposed of his arms, she ordered him to stand with his back against a near-by tree; and quickly, with the rope she had brought, she tied him so fast that he could not move any part of his body but his head.

When he was hopelessly entrapped, she sank wearily to the ground and covered her face with her hands. She was dead tired, her limbs ached, and her feet were like scorched coals. She felt old and weak. The fire, lighting up her face, showed plainly the deep lines engraved there.

"You're tired, ma'am," said the prisoner.

"I've been in the saddle all day," she replied, forgetting for a moment who this man was and why she had come for him. When the thought recurred to her, she stiffened and looked at him out of desperate, agonized eyes. "You shot my son!" she cried, and her voice broke.

The man turned his face away from her for a moment, and held his cheek against the cool, fragrant bark. Then he turned his eyes on her again.

"You're pretty good for an old lady," he said weakly. "I should 'a' known better than to start a fire; but I was gosh-awful hungry. I thought I'd take a chance an' make some hot coffee. You don't know what it means to travel all day an' then feel hungry. You don't—"

He broke off suddenly, and sent her an ashamed glance.

"But you must be all done up, ma'am," he went on. "Thar's the coffeepot settin' on the coals. The coffee's good, I guarantee you. It'll fix you up fine. An' thar's some blankets on the saddle o' my horse yonder."

Satisfied that he was altogether helpless and in her power, she rose and secured the blankets. One of them she threw over her

shoulders, and the other she stretched before the fire, which began to blaze furiously as the wind that howled down the steep grade of the mountains stirred its embers.

Filling a cup with hot coffee, she drank it down, and felt more comfortable. As she drained the last drop, she felt his eyes upon her, hungry and pleading. She filled the cup again and took it to him.

"Open your mouth," she directed. "I'll give you some."

He turned his head away.

"Naw," he said. "I don't want any."

"You'd better take it," she urged.

For the first time she took notice of his appearance. He could not be over twenty-one, she thought, and his face was not the kind that one would associate with a hardened criminal. There was something about his eyes that caught her sympathy, though she could not explain why; but then the thought of the blood on David's forehead sent a cold shiver through her, and she emptied the coffee at the prisoner's feet.

"You shot my boy!" she whispered. "You shot my boy Davy, who drives the stage. Ah, God, he may not be alive in the morning!"

"I'm right sorry, ma'am. It's my way."

"What's your way?" she asked.

"Holdin' up stages. I've been at it for years—ever since I was a kid; but I never—"

"Ah, how could you shoot my Davy?" she asked him, wringing her hands.

Then she set her teeth together, and, with all the strength she could muster, she struck him across the face again and again, until his skin showed blue in the darkness.

"You shot my boy!" she moaned. "You shot him—my Davy, my Davy!"

V

THE bandit hung his head on his breast and said nothing. The fire was dying out. She moved toward it, and fed the blaze with bits of broken twigs that lay scattered about the ravine. Presently it was leaping up again, a geyser of orange and blue flame shooting out of the earth. Mary Fuller sat facing the warmth, with her back to the man she had captured, her rifle over her knees.

"I'm afraid to go back," she whispered to herself. "He may be dead!"

She turned her head swiftly in the direction of the prisoner, and spat at him like an enraged animal.

"You'll hang for this!" she cried. "Hanging's too good for the likes of you! Murderer!"

He did not answer her. The only sounds audible were the crackle of the twigs as they disintegrated under the attack of the flames, and the moan of the wind sweeping down through the cañon.

After a few minutes she stretched herself out on the blanket, but the ground was hard and unresponsive. She sat up again, trembling, in the path of the chill wind.

"Thar's another blanket over yonder by that boulder," the man's voice came to her.

"I couldn't sleep under a blanket that's covered a murderer!" she answered.

"Maybe you wouldn't mind gettin' me a cigarette?" he asked her pleadingly. "Thar's a pouch of tobacco in my bag, an' some rice papers. I won't bother you again, ma'am. Would you, please?"

A certain intonation in his voice cut her deeply. She rose from the ground, and sought out the bag of which he had spoken. It was a long, bulky parcel, in which he carried all his possessions, in the manner of an army private.

She dragged it out in front of the fire. In the dancing light that the flames projected, she found the pouch he had asked for; but her discovery was not made until she had removed certain other articles. She left these scattered on the ground, while she made up for him a batch of cigarettes, just as she had often done for David. Then she came up to the tree where he was tied, placed one of the cigarettes in his mouth, and lit it with a burning twig from the fire. He puffed in bliss.

"God bless you, ma'am!" he murmured.

"Don't speak of Him!" she answered in a low voice. "How could He hear the likes of you?"

"That's right," he said wistfully; "but maybe He'll hear me this one time."

She left him to puff at his cigarette, and returned to the edge of the fire. While replacing the articles she had removed from his bag in her search for the tobacco pouch, she hesitated for a moment over a curious-looking case. She opened it with trembling fingers, and cried out at the violin she saw before her. She lifted the instrument from its inclosing box, and it shone in the dancing light.

After a time she could hear herself saying, in a voice that somehow refused to sound like her own:

"Whose fiddle is this? Where did you get it?"

"That belonged to my father," he told her.

She could not face him now. She remained standing before the fire, like a musician who has played out her soul in melodies bitter and sweet, and, exhausted, has nothing more to give. Several times she passed her hand over the silky surface of the instrument. The picture of a man and a little boy moving down the road was stretched mockingly before her eyes.

"It ain't true!" she said to herself, and then again: "It can't be true! He's torturing me—the murderer! He shot my son! Davy may be dead now. Oh, God, tell me it's not true!"

But the picture of the man and boy continued to mock her. She remembered how Tim had halted in the middle of the road, and had lifted his fiddle high in the air, like a romantic gypsy. She turned around with the violin in her grasp, and faced her prisoner, who looked at her out of questioning eyes.

"This belonged to your father?"

"Yes, ma'am. My dad, he was a right smart musician, but he's dead now. He was playin' the wheel in Virginia City, an' he got into an argument, an' they shot him. He turned the fiddle over to me, as if he was sayin', 'It's sacred, boy. Take good care of it.'"

The young bandit paused, and lifted his eyes to the silver radiance of the sky.

"I guess it's just as well he never told me who my mother was," he added, laughing softly.

Mary Fuller approached him, studying his face intently—his eyes, the way he had of compressing his lips, the way in which he tossed his head back to get the hair out of his eyes. She knew only one other who had that mannerism—an intimate peculiarity that was somehow locked up in her breast, a sacred thing. She must ask this young man's name.

And yet, if he was what she thought he was, what new travail of the spirit must she suffer? Had she not sorrow enough already, with her younger son battling for his life?

She stooped quickly, picked up one of the cigarettes she had rolled for him, and placed it in his mouth. As she lit the cigarette, she peered deep into his eyes. She stood in front of him as if paralyzed.

"You must hate me, ma'am," he said; "an' I guess you're right. I ain't no good, for sure. Why, ever since I can remember, I've been a bum, roamin' around like a dog what's been kicked out of decent society. I've traveled some, I have." He moved his head proudly, in the way of a little boy trying to impress his elders. "Say, d'you know I've been in South America? I worked on a ranch in the Argentine for a while. That was three years ago. I thought I'd go straight, but Tex Roberts—he was the fellow with me—kept naggin' me an' naggin' me."

He stopped abruptly, as if aware that what he said might cause trouble for some one else. When he did speak again, it was to whisper:

"But I'm not blamin' anybody but myself, ma'am."

"What was your father's name?" she asked, gripping his hand in her own and holding it tightly.

"Say, ain't that funny? I never knew his last name, he had so many of 'em; but his first was Tim. He used to play all them Southern tunes—'Massa's in de cold, cold ground,' and like that."

"Tim, you say?"

"That's the only name I knowed him by. Say, ma'am, when they're hangin' me, maybe you'll say a prayer? Maybe you'll see that I get a decent buryin'?"

"And you don't remember your mother?" she asked, unconsciously pressing his hand more tightly.

"Only a little bit, like a dream that you ain't sure of. I got a kind of recollection of her standin' in the doorway when me an' paw left her—standin' sort of sad like, with a baby in her arms. That must 'a' been my brother. Wonder where he is now? He'll never know when I hang from the highest branch of some cottonwood. Thar's always some consolation in the world, ain't that, ma'am? I wonder how it feels to be dead!"

"And you don't remember anything more about your mother?" she pressed him eagerly. "Her first name? Yes—her first name?"

"Hanged if I know, except that she came from Ohio, an' she stood about your height, I should say. But did you hear me—'hanged if I know'? It'll be hanged if I do an' hanged if I don't, sure enough!"

"Ah, don't! Don't! You're hurting an old woman! Why did you shoot my boy—

your bro—ah, trying to make up to me! Trying to get on my good side, when you shot my Davy! He's just a boy. Seventeen—what's that? He never did anything to you—never! He could have loved the likes of you."

"Sure enough!" the prisoner whispered, and turned his head away.

She beat him with her fists on his face, his chest—beat him with all her strength.

"You're tryin' to make me kind, but I hate you! D'you hear, Ben? I hate you! I could never love you!"

The young man turned his eyes on her in great surprise.

"Did you say Ben, ma'am?"

"Well, it ain't Ben, is it?"

"It is, sure enough. You're a good guesser, ma'am!"

Turning away from him, she passed out of the light and warmth of the camp fire to the top of a little hill that rose mournfully near by. She called upon herself to be strong in this moment of despair, of utter anguish.

All the rest of the night she paced restlessly to and fro, beating at her breast, clutching her hands, and giving way to periods of weakness, when she sobbed harshly and the tears rolled down her worn face. At last, with the first gray of dawn wakening the mountains and cañons from their dark, gigantic slumber, she retraced her steps to the tree where he was tied. Her face was a mask of set determination. She bore herself like a soldier who will not give way in the face of a thousand sharp-pointed bayonets.

She set about untying him.

"I'm taking you into town," she said tersely. "You're going to pay the price for shooting my boy. You belong to the sheriff—not to me. Maybe my boy is alive; but if he should be dead, God rest your soul! Yes, I'll pray for you and see that you get a decent burying."

He made no attempt to overcome her, though he might have done so, for she was weak and helpless beside his youthful strength. She found her pony and seated herself in the saddle. He took the reins and led the way back into town, stumbling before her.

VI

THE sun was in mid heaven when they arrived in the outskirts of Silver Bow. As they moved down the dusty road called

Main Street, the whole population gathered to watch them. The "old lady" had got one of the bad men! Wondering crowds—prospectors, storekeepers, and hangers-on, with their wives and children—followed Mrs. Fuller and her captive. The scene was something like the streets of Paris during the Reign of Terror, when the death carts rattled their lugubrious way to the guillotine.

In front of the sheriff's office David's mother dismounted from her horse, covering the prisoner with her rifle. The sheriff came out into the street, scratching his gray hair and blinking his eyes, as if he couldn't believe his senses.

"Sheriff," whispered Mary Fuller, "I've brought you the man who shot my Davy." She lowered her gun suddenly, and would have fallen, had not one of the crowd of spectators held her up. "How is he?" she begged. "How is my son—that other one?"

"Don't you worry, mother," said the sheriff, overcoming his first astonishment. "Davy's not goin' to die. He's goin' to pull through first rate. He's got a constitution like iron, an' I'm thinkin' he gets it from you."

The sheriff turned to the prisoner, but that young man did not give any indication of fear or anxiety. He stood there in the midst of the staring crowd, pale and listless, tired and weak after the long, laborious tramp just completed.

"You was with Tex Roberts when he shot Davy Fuller, our stage driver," accused the representative of the law.

The prisoner backed away, and made a move of shamed surprise.

"Did Tex say he shot—" he began, and then compressed his lips.

"He did the shootin' an' you went after the pay roll," continued the sheriff. "Am I right?"

"Well—"

"Am I right?"

"Sure enough! It was Tex Roberts did the shootin'."

David's mother, who had been standing by without a word while this conversation took place, suddenly stumbled forward with a cry of relief, embraced the startled pris-

oner, and kissed his mouth. The sheriff made an effort to tear her away, perhaps thinking that the strain had been too much for her mind; but she would not be separated from her prisoner.

"Don't touch me!" she sobbed. "He's my boy—my son that went away from me years ago!"

"Now, mother—" began the sheriff soothingly.

"No, you must leave me alone! I'm his mother, and I know that my boy could never shoot any one. It was the other man. Ben, listen to me, my son! If they take you away, I'll wait for you. Look at me! If they should take you away, I'll wait till you come back."

Ben Fuller looked down at his mother. His eyes were wet, and he buried his head against her breast.

For a time they stood thus locked in a close embrace. Then he struggled to be free of her. He held her off strongly, and looked at the sheriff.

"I'm ready to go with you now, sheriff," he said.

The sheriff, who embodied the only law that Silver Bow possessed, was thus called upon to preside unexpectedly over a situation at once difficult and extraordinarily simple. He deliberated for a few minutes. Then he grasped the prisoner's arm.

"Son," he said slowly, "bein' as how you're only an accessory to the crime, which has turned out to be a chapter from the Bible—I hope you're acquainted with the story of the Prodigal Son—I'm transferrin' you to the jurisdiction of another court. Your mother happens to be judge of that court, an' your brother is twelve good men an' true. Whatever they say goes with me!"

A few minutes later Ben Fuller was helping his mother through the door that led into the cabin behind Big Butte Hill. David, sitting up in bed, lifted his arm and brushed his heavy black hair back from his forehead.

"I guess you're Ben," he said. "Don't ask me how I know. I know—that's all. Who was it said that blood is thicker than water? Gosh, never mind! It's God's truth."

Solace

WHY MYRA MILLS, ART DEALER, SUDDENLY DECIDED TO CHANGE HER PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

By Dorothy D. Miller

IT happens to some men and to countless women. It is a terrible thing, but so commonplace that only those who have experienced it take it seriously. For the unknowing of the world it is something at which to toss a passing, sentimental sympathy, something to jest about, or something to disbelieve.

A few, a sad few, die from its effects. A few, a mad few, destroy themselves. The rest—the many who mingle, undistinguished, with the happier unknowing—pray vainly for death, fear it, and so fill up their empty lives with trifles and live them out to the predestined day.

When love breaks a heart, the soul that must thereafter endure its heavy, limping throbs cries aloud in the silences of its being for love, love! But the one solace for a heart broken by love is work.

In a little art shop on a cross street not far below Petticoat Lane, Myra Mills struggled with her books. She sat in her tiny office cut off from one corner of the workroom, this latter being divided from the galleries by a partition tinted a soft ivory on the one side, and hung with tapestry on the other. The heavily draped archway separated the dining room of the establishment from its kitchen, if the metaphor may be used and not misinterpreted; for such was the contrast between the luxuriously decorated galleries, crammed with beautiful wares served up for purchase, and the simple inner room where they were made, or were unpacked for the display tables.

It was early for Miss Mills's fashionable clientèle to be abroad. Occasionally, however, the little bell above the entrance door tinkled quaintly as some casual passer-by drifted in to look around. Then Ruth, or

Beatrice, or Slivers—her young helpers—went swiftly forth to serve and watch. Between the interruptions they kept nimble fingers busy at artistic tasks, while Myra labored earnestly over figures that would not balance on the confused pages of her buckram-bound ledgers.

"If only I had a better head for the business end of my business!" she thought despairingly, tapping a polished thumb nail with her incompetent gold pencil. "That's always been my trouble, right from the beginning. Artistic eyes and hands, but no head for business!"

She spread her tapering fingers flat on the desk before her, and shook her permanently waved and prettily bobbed graying hair over them.

"You're all right, hands, as far as you go; but there are times when you need a brain to guide you, and you haven't got it. The simple mind that rules you will get you into trouble yet. Well, here's the stock I owe for, here's the overhead, here's what we've taken in, and here's what's coming in. Now let's see!"

She began her wearisome calculations again, her pale brow wrinkled over her problem of seeing whether the ends of her bank account overlapped her expenses, or underlapped them. Yet to her girls, as they ran in from time to time for instruction or approval, she presented a countenance unruffled and unperturbed, masked with the expression of capability and authority that proclaimed the successful woman of business.

In her rare moments of soliloquy Myra Mills dared to confess her weaknesses and her fears. Before her associates she apparently had neither the one nor the other. Poise, pose—whatever it was with her, it gave to her bearing a regal air of ind. pend-

ence, of self-sufficiency. Only Myra knew what a timorous, trembling heart her pride cloaked.

Ruth, the dependable, Beatrice, the beautiful, and Slivers, the elfin-faced gamin with the busy tongue, never worked in glum and unfriendly quiet. They chattered as they plied needle and brush and paste tube on silks and parchments and crape paper. The musical bell, warning of a customer, lowered their voices to a subdued pitch, according to Miss Mills's laws; but as it rang out the departing shopper the eager talk surged high again. They were not trying to spare her ears.

Myra overheard indifferently. Then she listened.

"To be sure she has," said Ruth positively. "Every woman has had, or has, or will have!"

"That means there's hope for you, then, ain't there, deary?" Slivers replied in a voice as thin as her person. "That's the reason why you want to believe it. You can't tell this clever kid no different and get away with it."

"Oh, I don't know, Ruth, about *every* woman's having one. Depends on the woman's charms, don't you think? But of course that lets Miss Myra in," Beatrice added.

"And let's me out, boo-hoo!"

"Hush, Slivers! She's working on the books. You'll disturb her."

"Well, you started this, Ruth, or I'm an old Dutch cleanser polishing the parlor piano. A little goes a long way, you know, and that's me, too. I said she said no, she never had had, and she did say so, too. 'Miss Myra,' I said to her yesterday, 'have you ever been in love?' 'No,' she said, 'I've always been in my right mind.' Pretty good, what?"

"Yes, Ruth, and then you said every woman has at least one love affair." Beatrice was supporting Slivers's statements. "Though I can't believe that all the homely old maids have had. They wouldn't be old maids if they had."

"Pish!" said Ruth disgustedly. "Just because you're rather pretty, Bee, you think men never fall in love with a girl who isn't a beauty. Well, they do. Haven't you ever looked around you at the homely married women there are?"

"Rich, probably," murmured Beatrice, unconvinced.

"That's bunk!"

"Sure, that's bunk, Bee; but what I wish is that she'd tell us about this love affair Ruth's given her, if she ever had it. Oh, Miss Myra!" Slivers called out impishly. "We're talking about you and lo-o-ove!"

"Aren't you usually?" Myra answered in mild reproof, rising to look in on them with an inscrutable smile.

"Atta boy! Bull's-eye!"

"Or about something else you know nothing about, my dears?"

"Oh, now, Miss Myra!" Beatrice protested amusedly. "She knows nothing about love? Well!"

"Ruth is wrong, for once; or else I am the exception that proves her rule. Work has been my only love. But this is not a very profitable discussion, girls. A little more quiet while I'm busy here—a little dusting, perhaps?"

They obeyed her commands without resenting them. She had a way of obtaining willing obedience from her helpers.

"And, girls," she added, patting the nearest shoulder affectionately, "Mr. Barnaby Hale of Willowtown is in the city. If he comes into the shop, I'm to be called at once—or, better, bring him back."

"So-ho!" chortled Slivers, naughtily impudent. "So-ho! Enter the hero! Maybe Ruth's got the low-down on you after all, Miss Myra. 'Has had, or has, or will have,' she said." Slivers stressed the future tense oracularly.

"He's not very susceptible for a small town man," remarked Beatrice, shrugging, but taking her lip stick from her bag hanging on the back of her chair.

Ruth shook out a dust cloth, her mouth set with prim conviction. What she knew she *knew*. No argument or denial could change her opinion.

"Now, my dears, that will do. There's the bell. Go into the shop, one of you."

Myra, however, turned back into her office. She looked long through its one window into the bleak alley.

Again! She had lied about it again; but she had lied so often, in almost the same words, that she couldn't think St. Peter took her lies very much amiss. It was as if she had a little secret pact with him, as if he understood that these lies were the foundation on which she had built her career.

Work was her only love. How often, how often, how often had she said so, pretended so, to save her face! Yet how she

had loved Dave, her wonderful David Blandon! Oh, the anguish of the wound, when its scars could pain so after the passing of fifteen years!

He was married before she fell in love with him, though she did not know it on the day when she handed him her heart. Mrs. David Blandon was visiting her own people when Dave Blandon came to Wind-plains and cast his unhappy eyes on little Myra Mills. His wife did not seem real to Myra, for the girl never met her. Still, she knew that the woman lived, for the lonely man told her so—too late to save her heart from his blundering, trembling hands. He broke it as he told her.

Then she ran away.

"I can't be satisfied here, father," she said. "I'm too ambitious for this dead little place. Let me go to the city and find work—success—"

Pretending to shake the village dust from her feet, when she could have kissed its pavements because he had trod them!

II

SHE had found work behind the counter of a great department store, and had embraced it, unashamed, with ecstasy. Work, work, blessed work—it would make her forget!

It hadn't, and she soon knew that it never would. She had not been a child, infatuate, but a woman who had found and lost her mate. Dave Blandon died a twelve-month after she left Windplains, and that added touch of tragedy assured his eternal place in her romantic memory.

His wife, she heard with scorn, had married again. Myra, denied her David, could not marry at all. In the contrast she saw the superiority of her grief and her love, and in her loneliness she found a certain consolation. As she slipped into spinsterhood, in her innermost thoughts she waved aloft the banner of her loyalty, and it gave her courage.

Not long, however, did Myra Mills clerk in a store. She had, she discovered, a flair for the artistic, and she had the good judgment to turn pioneer. Ten years before she had leased this shop for an experimental five years, gambling her savings and her little patrimony to stock it. Five years later she had renewed the lease, for art shops of her sort had become comparatively stable institutions, and hers had earned its popularity.

6

To-day, when Barnaby Hale of Willow-town came in, she would sign a new lease—this time, she believed, for a decade. Why not? She was well established, whatever the hieroglyphics of her books might say.

In the realty transaction Barnaby Hale represented his widowed sister-in-law, who owned the small building in which Myra rented space. As her proxy landlord, Myra had become well acquainted with the big, rather gauche man, whose tailoring was never quite right or quite wrong. His smile of deference and shy admiration, however, reduced his apparel to such insignificance as clothes assume when measured with more vital factors of appearance. Whenever he came to the city he dropped into her shop and she helped him to select gifts for his two little motherless daughters. Once or twice she had correctly interpreted his wistful references to the unfriendliness of a crowded city, and had helped him to phrase a theater invitation, which she then accepted. She found him a pleasant, unexciting companion, and a gentleman. When he had left town she always promptly forgot him until her shop was in need of repairs, when she demanded them without hesitancy and obtained them without altercation.

Her thoughts of the past having led her up to the present and Barnaby Hale, Myra turned from the window when she heard Slivers's running footsteps, believing them to be the forerunner of his quieter advance; but the heels that came tapping across the workroom were high and satin covered, not low and of rubber.

"Miss Myra, she was so nosy we couldn't head her off," Slivers whispered. Then, drawing herself up with a resentful dignity, to offset the fact that the sanctum on the flat side of the velvet curtains was being invaded, she announced the intruder formally. "Miss Mills, this *lady* wishes to speak to you, please," she said, conveying by her delicate accent her private estimate of the lady's unladylike ways.

"You run this shop, do you?" asked the domineering woman who stood on the office threshold. "Good! Your clerks are fairly good-looking girls, except that little skinny one. Do they know the business pretty well?"

"If they have not been able to serve you to your pleasure," said their employer, coldly polite, "perhaps I can assist you in

your purchasing. What did you wish to buy?"

"Maybe nothing, maybe everything. Think I'll sit down," said the woman, doing so.

She herself was not fairly good-looking, but what she lacked in pulchritude she made up in force. She was impressive, not because of her face, which was heavy-featured, nor because of her heavy figure, which was tightly armored, but because of the strong will that shone nakedly through her make-up and her corsets.

A little chill of terror crept down Myra's graceful spine. Here was a woman who would have her way, whatever it was. Myra would be no more capable of stopping such an invader than were her valiant girls. She seated herself, that she might rise again as a suggestion of dismissal; but she knew, as she leaned back, that the woman before her would leave when she got ready, and none the sooner for her hostess's rising.

"What can I do for you?"

"I've decided to go into this art shop business."

"Then you will go," murmured Myra.

"Yes. I'm thinking about buying you out."

"Oh!"

"Don't you want to sell? You will when you think it over. You'll find it will be to your advantage."

"Indeed?"

The woman was insufferable and terrifying. Myra wouldn't show her fright, though. She had hidden nervous alarm before, and she could hide it again. Did this person come from the Crescent Art Factories, perhaps? Myra had owed their account for a long time—too long. She could have made a good payment on it if she had been able to resist those expensive old prints. Bad judgment!

She wouldn't be bullied, however.

"Indeed?" she repeated haughtily.

"Yes, but I don't want to talk terms today. I'm just looking around. You carry a good line of stuff. You're an artist, ain't you?"

"Oh, no! I wish I were."

"You're too much of a one, as it is, and not enough of a business woman." The horrible creature's divination was uncanny. Had she sensed how uncontrollable were the books? "For instance, you do your own bookkeeping. That's a waste of your

time, and you probably don't know anything about double entry, either." Yes, she had sensed Myra's books. She could read them through their covers! "And you buy too much stock just because it's pretty. Then you can't get it off your shelves, because it's too artistic to take ordinary folk's eyes. That ain't storekeeping. You've got to have a quick turnover to make quick money."

"Really, you know, madam"—Myra's voice was as icy as her heart in the grip of the terror that these truths inspired—"really, it is rather rude of you to take such an unwarranted interest in my personal affairs!"

"Why, probably it does seem so to you, Miss Mills. I'm so blunt-spoken that strangers often misunderstand me; but when I get an idea I follow it up, and I can't be put off the track by stopping to palaver. You can show me to the door now, if you want. I'm rested, and I guess I've seen over your place pretty well."

She tucked straying locks of dyed black hair up under her hat, and rose briskly.

"I'm Mrs. Gideon Jones. Here's my card."

Digging into her Boston bag, she drew from it a square of cardboard and tossed it on Myra's spinnet desk.

"I'll have to change that for a roller top, to fit me, won't I?" she remarked.

Dumbly, Myra bestowed on the invader a sarcastic, superior smile. It was the best she could do. She couldn't find words with which to resent and confute the woman's outrageous impudence.

"To-morrow," went on Mrs. Jones, as she crossed the workroom with Myra trailing helplessly in her wake, "we'll call in some expert accountants to go over your books. Then I'll make you an offer. It'll be fair, but not fancy—not fancy. This room"—she gave it critical scrutiny—"this room can have another showroom cut off it. Your shop girls don't need all this space wasted on 'em. It's plain and sensible, though, the way you've got it fixed up. Here's where you rest your eyes from all that artistic truck, ain't it?"

"We need two atmospheres to keep our sense of balance," Myra explained, for it was part of her creed that she and her girls should not be suffocated in the exotic environment of her galleries.

"Yes, I'd think so," agreed Mrs. Jones. "You say your girls are pretty good?"

She examined them calmly, as if they were bridge lamps, mitered mirrors, or fire dogs.

"I'll keep them on, then, on trial—even the frisky one, if she ain't as saucy as she looks. This little bell"—as it rang out Myra's pæan of relief at her departure—"it ain't so bad. Some people like anything they think's old-fashioned, and a shop bell's that, all right. Maybe I'll leave it. This is a good location, if it is a bit out of the way, and your being here has got people in the habit of coming around, I suppose. Well, good-by, Miss Mills. I'll see you again later."

"Tell me, tell me," begged the pale, slender woman, looking after the departing visitor, "was she here, girls, or have I been having a nightmare?"

"I wanted to hotfoot it for a cop, Miss Myra, but they wouldn't let me," said the impulsive Slivers.

"Ugh, can you imagine looking like that, even when you're old?" added Beatrice.

"Miss Myra, has she bought the shop?" inquired Ruth.

"No, Ruth, she hasn't; but I thought any moment she would, in spite of all I said. Such unmitigated impertinence, such presumptuous insolence I have never before had to endure, and I hope I never shall again!"

She hoped, she hoped devoutly, that the woman had only just escaped from her keepers, and that they would recapture her at the Walnut Street corner; but she knew that Mrs. Gideon Jones was as rational as she was impressive, and as formidable as her appearance.

III

A GROUP of customers entering the shop put upon Myra the burden of cheerful composure. She greeted them with the benign and gracious smile that always brought them back for the guidance of her excellent taste when they wanted bridge prizes, or a really good etching to hang over the fireplace.

There followed much light bargaining and laughter, much appreciation, prettily worded, of the dainty elegance of her wares. Compliments pleased Myra, not because they were barometers by which to gauge the ever changing pressure of popular opinion, but because they were the coin that best repaid her for her labors. She was proud of the lovely things she sold, proud of the

setting in which her girls showed them, proud of her shop, and of herself because it was hers. Having forgotten the alarming Mrs. Jones, she was very happy as she pulled forth drawers in search of exactly the right sort of a hammered brass fruit bowl for a place on a Tudor buffet.

"Miss Myra!" Ruth slipped an arm about her waist and spoke in a very low voice. "There's Mr. Hale. Shan't I take over this while you wait on him? Beatrice is fussing him terribly showing him those bed lamps."

"They do look intimate, the exquisite little things, don't they, Ruth? No wonder he blushes, poor, dear, sensitive rustic! Or it may be because Beatrice is so close to him. Her perfume is—tangibly feminine. I'll save him and his purse from her wiles."

"Thought maybe I'd best wait till you weren't busy, Miss Mills," said Barnaby Hale, shaking her hand, with gratitude in the fervor of the motion. He was plainly a man afraid of women, though he stood at greater ease as he looked at one of his own generation, one not so dashing in her charms as the youthful but sophisticated Beatrice. "This young lady was trying to help me, but I'm a tough customer."

He smiled so timidly and ingratiatingly as he spoke that both his hearers laughed.

"You a tough customer?" repeated Miss Myra unbelievingly.

"I'll say he is, Miss Myra! I can't please him," confessed Beatrice, drifting away.

A man, and she couldn't please him! Indeed, she would say he was a tough customer—tough, or blind, or perhaps just older than he looked.

Neither Barnaby nor Myra missed her.

"Perhaps your daughters would like these amber desk sets," Myra suggested. "Either the amber or the ivory would be nice for them."

"Yes," said her customer, fumbling with his bill fold. "I'll take them. They always like what you pick out. You know, Miss Mills, I hated coming in to see you this time."

"You *did*, Mr. Hale? Why, how unflattering!"

The arch ejaculation was not very businesslike, nor was the tiny pout that accompanied it; but the girls were busy, and were not looking on at the middle aged coquetry. The man, though he saw the puckered lips, looked quickly away.

"You know that I like coming in to see you," he contradicted himself, swallowing unsteadily; "but this time I have to say some things that I don't want to say, and some things that I want to say I don't know how to say."

"Why, what can you mean, Mr. Hale?"

"Did you want a new lease, Miss Mills?"

His brown fingers shook as he played with the amber desk knife.

"Of course! Haven't I been a good tenant? Haven't I prospered here? Of course I want a new lease!"

"Well, Miss Mills, she's raising the rent. She's making it three times as much as you're paying now."

Three times as much as Myra was paying—and the rent was already almost more than she could pay!

"That's profiteering—banditry! I won't stand for such treatment! I won't sign!"

"I'm sorry," said Barnaby Hale. "I said all I could for you, but she won't listen."

Myra looked around her shop, dazed. She was tired and old. There were no customers. The girls were standing in an idle group, looking out through the big front windows, which she had always kept sparkling, crystal clear.

She had been a good tenant. It was wicked, such a raise. She hated the woman, hated this man who was her agent. The girls—she must keep this from them. She didn't want to hear them rave.

"I'll—consider things," she said finally. "I'm busy on my books to-day. Come in again to-morrow, please. Perhaps we can—compromise."

"I'm sorry," repeated Barnaby Hale, looking awkwardly abject.

"That's kind of you, but it doesn't help me much, does it? However"—she straightened her shoulders and raised her chin in a splendid gesture of unconquerable determination—"I'll win. I always do."

"You are a smart woman, a thoroughbred business woman. You'll win; and if you do, I'll lose, I guess. Well, I'll stop in later."

He left the shop, and the little bell tinkled mournfully after him.

"Girls, I'm not to be disturbed," said Myra Mills in an authoritative voice which said that for all her amiability she was mistress here.

And, undisturbed, she spent the rest of the day in her office.

IV

At closing time, however, she had not mastered her situation. Two and two would make four, but unless she could make at least six out of them she could not meet such a raise in her rent as her unfeeling landlord demanded.

"When I signed that last lease, I knew I ought to have it made for ten years," she rebuked herself wrathfully; "but no, I was afraid to. I was afraid my luck might change. Well, it has changed. If I can't bluff them out, I don't know what I shall do. I'm right on the rim of the shopping circle now. People know where to find me, and they don't have to come much out of their way; but suppose I move—what then?"

Wearily she pondered, weighing her chances judicially.

"This district is congested. There isn't a vacant room on the ground floor within blocks and blocks of here; and even if there was a decent downtown shop to be rented, it would come as high as the price they're demanding for this store. Suppose I move out into a residence section? If I got into one where I could pay the rent, I'd have a neighborhood grocery on one side of me, a beauty parlor or a dry cleaning establishment on the other, and across the street an 'art' shop where they do hemstitching and picot edging! Heavens, no! Imagine my sable and ermine customers coming to such a place! They wouldn't. I'd lose all the prestige I've worked so hard to get. I can't build up a new business. I haven't the spirit to try. Failure! I'm facing failure after all my hard fight!"

She dropped her head to her desk, but raised it quickly and wiped away her discouraged tears. She mustn't let her girls see her despair. She must keep a bold front before them—before everybody.

"Good night, Miss Myra! We're going," they called in to her, hurrying into their wraps like school children.

"Please, Miss Myra, don't stay here working alone. Can't I help? I'll stay," offered Ruth, a frown of worry between her eyes.

"Bugaboos'll getcha, Miss Myra!" warned Slivers. "You'd better run home before dark. Since we've quit wearing hats, you don't catch me out after the sun

sets, unless I got a date with a policeman or a bandit sheik!"

"I'd be scared to death to stay here alone," confessed Beatrice. "Suppose some man should get in!"

"Aw, now, Bee, you wouldn't be afraid of a man—not of a mere *man*," the others teased her.

Myra, undaunted by their fears for her, waved them from the shop.

"Send me in a malted milk and sandwiches from the drug store," she bade them. "I promise I won't stay late."

They were fond of her. It was good to know that they were fond of her, for she loved them dearly. They were all she had to love besides herself and her work.

It was, however, quite dark when a tapping on the glass of her front door brought her to a tense erectness, as she sat in a needlepoint tapestried chair, looking unseeing at the Persian rugs on the floor of her middle gallery, thinking, thinking how to find a way to keep them there.

The night watchman? No, it was too early for him. Robbers? She almost hoped so; she carried a sufficient amount of insurance. Whoever it was could see her, no doubt, as she sat in the half light filtering back on her from the softly illuminated shop window. She would turn on the high lights in the front gallery, and see what other wolf was knocking at her door.

A collie dog, not a wolf! Gentle, big old Barnaby Hale, frightening her because he was frightened for her.

"You oughtn't to sit in here alone at night," he said, as she stepped back to let him enter. "Do you often? It isn't safe."

"I don't often, but I'm happier here than at my lodgings. It's more like home to me."

"It would come hard to give it up, wouldn't it?" asked the countryman, turning his hat in his hands.

"Yes," said Myra, "unbearably hard. I'll take that chair. Sit here."

She switched a table lamp on and the high lights off, and seated herself near him.

"Do you really think I shan't be able to induce your sister-in-law to be reasonable?" she asked.

"If you can, Miss Myra, you'll be the first person who ever could!"

"Really? I thought perhaps, if I told her about my business, and about rentals in this district and all—"

"She knows more about your business right now than you do, if you'll listen to her tell it. She always does—anybody's business; and she knows such a raise is a freeze-out. No," he said regretfully, "she won't listen to fair talk. She hasn't paid this property any attention for years—not since she raised on you last; but now that she's taken this notion she won't give way an inch. She'll make you pay up or get out, Miss Mills, I'm sorry to say."

"It's despicable of her! It's cruel! It's unchristian!"

"Yes, but facts are facts, I'm afraid."

"Well, I shan't be beaten so easily. I'm not one to give in. I'm established here, and I can't afford to move. I might better sell out and buy new stock, if I have to start over."

If she sold everything she had for what she could get, she would probably realize enough to settle her debts; but how could she buy the "new stock" of which she was speaking so largely? Not, she feared, on her credit. Wholesale companies other than the Crescent Art Factories had been compelled to be grudgingly patient with her. She concealed this phase of her situation, however, and went on, without pausing, still speaking largely:

"What I have built here is this shop's personality. I couldn't move *that*; but if I could sell an interest in the business to a partner with capital—it's growing every day, this art shop business. Only this morning a lady hinted that she'd like to buy me out." The little card lying in the darkness on her mahogany desk glowed translucently before her eyes. "I could probably make an advantageous deal with her, by taking her in with me—retaining the controlling interest, of course."

She sighed inwardly. She could never control her business with Mrs. Gideon Jones in it. Still, better half a loaf than starvation. She could never start over again—never. She was not young enough. She was rooted here. Transplanted, she could not grow so tall again.

V

BARNABY HALE sat looking at her gallant little figure, at the determined expression of her bravely deceitful face, with an aura of unhappiness incasing his own slouching body, from his thick gray hair to his broad-toed shoes.

"I knew you'd never want to give up this fine business," he said.

"It's my life," said Myra Mills.

"Yes!" He rose. "I thought you'd feel that way. Well, might I take you to your boarding house?"

"Thank you, yes." Myra stood beside him, with a pointed finger pressed to her full lower lip. "When you go back to Willowtown" — she spoke thoughtfully, trying to frame a crushing message for him to deliver — "when you go back to Willowtown, be kind enough to tell your Mrs. Timothy Hale —"

"She's moved here to the city," said Barnaby — brother of Timothy, deceased — "and she ain't Mrs. Hale any more. She's right unlucky with husbands. They can't outlast her."

"Oh, she has married the second time?"

"Third time. First she was Mrs. David Blandon —"

"No, no!" gasped Myra, throwing the back of her white hand against her mouth.

Barnaby Hale was ticking off matrimonial ventures on his brown fingers. He did not see.

"First she was Mrs. Dave Blandon, then she was Mrs. Timothy Hale, and now she's Mrs. Gideon Jones."

"No!" protested Myra in a whispering scream, helpless, reeling, collapsing.

Barnaby caught her in a strong and tender arm, and fanned her with his hat.

"My dear, my dear!" he said, for her eyes were tight shut, and it was easy to speak when she could not hear. "It's too hard — this business life is too hard on a bit of a woman like you. Lord, I've wished for years you'd fail, and need me, so that I could take you back to Willowtown to mother my girls!"

Myra opened her eyes wide, and he dropped her bashfully but gently into the arms of the tapestry chair.

"Barnaby Hale, I heard what you said!"

"Well, I never thought I'd be able to say it, Miss Myra, but miracles happen.

I've said it, and I mean it if ever a man did!"

"Why haven't you told me before this, then?"

"I could see what your work meant to you, Miss Myra, you being so successful. I knew you wouldn't give it up for me, with nothing much to offer you except — you know, Myra."

"Nothing much but — love?"

"That's right!"

Myra hid her face with her slender, artistic hands. The dear, the dear, the timid, slow dear! She was fond of him already, and he had just started to make her love him. Her girls would be pleased, all three of them — especially Ruth, who saw at least one romance in every woman's life; though even Ruth knew nothing of Myra's David.

Slowly she uncovered her wet eyes and looked about her shop. She hadn't a business head. She couldn't keep it. Mrs. Gideon Jones had beaten her again. She couldn't keep her shop from that formidable woman any more than she could take her David away from her. Law was on the other woman's side before, luck was on her side now. Myra Mills had failed — failed — failed!

Failure hurt. Oh, it hurt like a dagger in her breast; but she raised her chin and her lips. Barnaby Hale should never know that she came to him defeated. His knowing would make him no happier, her it would reduce to ignominious shame. She gathered her pride about her, and hid forever in its folds the secret of impending ruin writ large on her books and her brain.

"My work," said Myra Mills, "has been my life, Barnaby Hale; but a woman will give up anything, even her life, for — love!"

She was a lady past the age of indiscretion, and he was a bashful gentleman from the country; but they knew what to do, and they did it. If the night watchman saw, he was welcome.

The one solace for a heart broken by work is — love.

A WHITE AZALEA

A BLOOM of dainty and ethereal birth,
Like dew or moonlight in a sylvan bower;
Perchance a fairy that is still on earth —
The soul of Mab imprisoned in a flower!

William Hamilton Hayne

A Letter from Kiandaga

THE SOCIAL CAREER OF NICHOLAS RANDALL, WHO WAS NOT
CONTENT TO FOLLOW HIS FATHER'S CALLING

By Ralph E. Mooney

NICHOLAS RANDALL was a disappointment to his father. For one thing, he didn't look right. He had a high forehead and gray eyes set in big, hollow sockets. At times the gray eyes would blaze with hot thoughts, and at other times they would sparkle with delight. When they blazed, his face would take on a dangerously insubordinate expression. When they twinkled, it would smile like the face of a plaster cherub.

For another thing, Nicholas Randall had nerves, feelings, and, apparently, a bounding, gregarious heart that might better have been the property of a puppy.

Nicholas—at nineteen, this was—had no idea of dignity or of respect for the high-born. He was inclined to smirk when perfectly able-bodied members of the Easton family asked him to carry messages from one to another over trivial distances—say from the living room to the second floor. He would grin when old Mr. Easton sputtered with rage because the weather was chilly, and would laugh at the Easton girls when they appeared with pompadours built over enormous rats and with gowns in the extreme of *princesse* lines.

On the other hand, he would display outright hostility to Mr. Collins Easton, who was also nineteen, and who was greatly given to issuing orders for the pleasure of seeing them obeyed. Sometimes, after a session with Mr. Collins, Nicholas would brood for hours in the pantry, a lank, hot-eyed bolt of anger.

This was all wrong. Nicholas Randall's father, you see, was a dear old English butler, whose whole mind was given to the professional problem of getting the right plates on the table at the right time and at precisely the right degree of temperature. He blandly refused to understand Ameri-

can second men and grooms who now and then declared that a man could find more agreeable and better paid work, or could, in short, circumvent the destiny that called him to be a servant.

Nicholas Randall's father didn't like the idea of getting above one's class. He had a serene feeling that Nicholas would come to his senses before long, and would be glad to be trained by an expert butler until fit to take a position for himself. Why, Heaven knew, with such a start, a lad might have his own pantry before he was thirty!

The father had made a mistake. He had sent Nicholas to Public School No. 316, supposing that his son would be returned to him with just enough education to be a good and faithful servant, able to jot down telephone messages and to read through the daily papers at quiet moments in the pantry. Public School No. 316 had responded ungratefully—or perhaps Nicholas had responded ungratefully. He had lived with an aunt in New York, and had absorbed education with unholly rapidity. Learning how to write, he had taken prizes in composition. Learning how to read without appreciable effort, he jumped from primers to the juvenile section of the Public Library, and devoured it at a rapid rate.

It is hard to tell how much reading an eager boy can do in his spare moments, but it is safe to estimate that Nicholas read or skimmed at least one-tenth of the volumes on hand at his uptown branch of the library before he finished high school. He went from the juveniles to general fiction when he was twelve or fourteen, and to all manner of abstruse works when he was a senior at high school. The dates on his issue card read consecutively and came in clusters. Nicholas's father, by the way,

hadn't meant him to take high school courses, but the ubiquitous and disturbing system had carried the boy through before the old man realized it.

Also, the system carried him to the baseball field, or to a vacant lot that served as one, and taught him to shout hoarsely and to swear frantically when the breaks of the game went against his team. It introduced him to boys like Chink Chalmers and Jakey Mandel.

"I see myself!" said Chink, when the calling of butler was mentioned. "I see myself! Not while there's ditches to dig!"

Jakey considered the subject of butting meditatively, and remarked:

"Yes, Nick, but there's no money in it."

So, although Nicholas Randall's father put in a diligent year training his son to the duties of second man and general house servant, and distressed his kindly old heart a thousand times, he failed signally.

One calamitous day young Mr. Collins returned from his last year at preparatory school, big with his own importance, and delighted to come back to a system of home life which made the youngest son monarch of all he surveyed. Nicholas, alert to his duties and enjoying the general excitement, was in the act of picking up one of Collins's bags when Collins looked over his shoulder.

"Here, Nicholas!" he said, in harsh imitation of his father. "Bring that bag upstairs, will you?"

Something writhed inside Nicholas—writhed and winced. Something else began to generate heat, which flowed to his cheeks and—though he did not know it—to his eyes. Mrs. Easton, hovering in the disdainful wake of her boy, observed, and had a momentary qualm.

"What's the matter with that creature?" she thought—as she explained to her friends, later, when she recalled the day. "Why, he looks positively sulky! I'm afraid he'll never do."

Above stairs, it was—

"Here, Nicholas, press my clothes up, will you? Here, boy!"

Boy! Intentionally degrading! Intentionally mean! Nicholas glanced at Collins's face—which was a fertile field of pimples, by the way—and found it gloating.

"Here, boy! Shine these shoes while you're about it." Collins was not imitating his father now. He was imitating—or, rather, he imagined that he was imitating—

the English nobility. "Look sharp, will you? I'll need them at once."

Nicholas went down, bearing garments and footwear, a live coal—a hot, furious coal, with tears somewhere under the crust that dried scaldingly at the rims of his eyes.

Below stairs, the buzzer sounded almost steadily. Now it was more orders from Collins, and now orders from Mrs. Easton on Collins's behalf. At length Nicholas mounted to Collins's room, set the shoes beside a chair, and began to hang up the freshly pressed suits. Collins was bustling about in his underwear, with a cigarette hanging from his lips. His pimples had been scrubbed and polished until they were the pink of fresh beefsteak. He exuded sensual contentment, certainty of position.

He uttered a scornful cry.

"I say, my boy, you haven't half done these shoes! You'll have to take them back and do them over."

Nicholas's arms dropped stiffly, and a heap of clothing fell upon the floor. He turned to Collins and let his eyes travel over the pimply face until they met the sneaking little black things that were the windows of Collins's soul.

"You go to hell!" said Nicholas, in a hoarse whisper.

Collins's eyes flashed white light, like a rabbit's.

"Here!" he said nervously. "You can't talk that way to me. You can't talk like that to your—"

Nicholas flew across the room like a terrier after a rat. In front of Collins Easton he paused for the fraction of a second necessary to set his feet. Then he delivered Chink Chalmers's famous one-two punch. Chink had learned this from a professional, and had kindly imparted it to his friends, making them suffer considerably during the period of initiation—*thud* with the left and, immediately, *thud* with the right.

Collins's scream made the roof tiles rattle. From all over the house people came on the run. No one really expected to find the young man alive, but they did. They found him alive and alone, sobbing over the blood that flowed from his mouth and madly rubbing a congested facial area, which had its center at his left eye but included all the region to the left of his nose.

He told them at once who was responsible. There was no sportsmanship in Collins, no idea of settling such affairs man to

man. He demanded Nicholas's head forthwith; but when search was made Nicholas was gone. So was his hat, so was a package of books he had bought at a second-hand store, and so, presumably, was his head.

There was a terrible scene at the aunt's house.

"You'll get no references!" the distressed father cried. "You'll get no references!"

"I don't care."

"But you must care! You can't get a position without them. You—you'll take to gambling or poaching, and end up before the magistrates. You must go and beg his pardon, and—"

"Phooey!" derided Nicholas. "Phooey! No, while there's ditches to dig!"

The father spent several anxious years, grieving, shaking his head, and scanning newspaper headlines for reports of the apprehension of gamblers and poachers. In the end, however, the dear old man found himself bodily removed from work and sent home to England, with all expenses paid by Nicholas. There he spent his remaining days, and to the very last he never ceased to be astonished that a boy like Nicholas, just an average boy, could not only defy tradition and come off unscathed, but could actually earn so much more than an experienced butler.

II

NICHOLAS hadn't meant what he said about digging ditches. He found a position in a department store, giving his aunt as a reference; but, beyond verifying the address, nobody ever looked her up. He went at his work with a vim that carried him along rapidly. In a year he was a salesman, in three years an assistant buyer. All the time he was reading, learning, meeting people, growing. At twenty-five he was a buyer, with a wide acquaintance and a good practical knowledge of business.

Then came the war. When it was over, he took his honorable discharge and his savings—he had learned to save as naturally and as easily as he learned to read—and went into business for himself in a Western city. His history thereafter is part of that of a system of chain stores. When the chain was organized, he became a member of it, and made his establishment a unit of the system. When the system proved a success, and was reorganized on a larger scale, he became head buyer and part

owner. Shortly afterward he aided in the establishment of other chains in adjoining States, figuring now in the rôle of financier.

So much in fifteen years. As his thirty-fifth birthday approached, Nicholas was living in a bachelor apartment, with a servant of his own—a Chinese, who adored him for the consideration he displayed to servants, and who took considerable advantage of it at the same time. He was a rather slender man, with a face that was eager and good-humored. The hollows about his eyes were gone. Now and again he would hug himself over the fact that he had won to a position where men respected him and admitted that he was human and worth while.

He had a heritage of good manners from his father, and a knowledge of the ways and habits of wealthy people. Accordingly, when he began to meet bankers and investment men, they were pleased with him. They liked his shrewdness and his evident ability to handle himself. Because he knew enough to avoid presuming upon their liking, they gave more liberally of themselves. Social advancement came to him. When old Dave Bunt, the bond broker, red-faced and tousled, proposed him for membership in the Kiandaga Club, every one was pleased.

Kiandaga was the particular pride of that particular Western city. To be made a member was to be taken into fellowship with the town's best. The club was founded in 1840. The four-square, broad-shouldered building of cut limestone which housed it had been standing since 1891, an emblem of the community's wealth and conservatism. The city was one where wealth and conservatism had increased more rapidly than population.

On his first appearance at the club, Dave Bunt descended upon Nicholas with a shout and conducted him to the famous Round Table, which was kept in a small room with walls of smoky oak paneling, on the second floor of the club building. The Kiandaga Round Table was consecrated to bachelors. Through forty dissipated and acquisitive years old Dave Bunt had been its leading spirit, taking over from the moist comedian known as Dewy Hickey in 1886, or thereabouts.

At the table Nicholas found tanned and ruddy-faced single men of all ages, whose clothing was so well tailored that it looked

merely comfortable, and scorned the arrangements of buttons, tapes, and lapels elsewhere taken as fashionable. They ate good, solid Kiandaga food—juicy beef, well roasted birds, filets that resembled cuts of living bronze, thick pies with honest filling, and slabs of cheese that had a rich reminiscence of cream in its odor and taste. They flipped clean-cut jokes about, and laughed best when jests were made at their own expense.

Nicholas sat with them and watched and listened, feeling like a freshman at his first Greek letter drag. Because he had never been a freshman at a fraternity drag, he enjoyed it the more.

III

SEVERAL months passed, and then, one evening, Nicholas made a fated passage across the lobby of Kiandaga. He was alone, smiling to himself. The lobby was solemn and empty. The figures of Greek nymphs in a life-size painting that graced the mezzanine landing of the broad staircase seemed more alive than the few members on hand.

A good many people, thought Nicholas, would complain that Kiandaga was sleepy and worthless, and would wonder why men strove and ached to become members. This atmosphere of restraint and unruffled living was the opposite of what you expected at the top of life.

"Nicholas!" came a sharp cry.

From the solemn, empty spaces a young man had materialized—a man about Randall's age. His black hair was parted in the middle, and so glossy that it resembled polished metal. He had a tiny mustache and an insolent curl to his lips. In his eyes, which were like the black balls that were put on hatpins for everyday wear, when hatpins were worn every day, was the staring, studied insolence of one who half understands life, but feels that he knows more of it than all the world put together.

"Why, Nicholas, are you working here?"

Randall stared. The young man's face was vaguely familiar and vaguely disliked, but he had not seen it in fifteen years. The eruption was gone from it, too.

"I'm sorry, but you have the advantage of me," he said.

"Isn't your name Nicholas Randall? Well, I'm Collins Easton. You used to work at our house—don't you remember?"

The final question was delivered as a

reprimand. Mr. Easton wanted it to be clear that he did not intend to bandy words with a menial.

Randall laughed. The thing that once used to writhe inside him gave a sluggish turn or two.

"Oh, of course," he said, at the end of his laugh; "but that was quite a while ago. Yes, I remember you. Naturally, you would think I might be employed here by the club; but things have changed, Easton, and I'm nothing so important as a servant here. I'm just a member."

"A member!" The incredulous tone was somewhat gratifying, although it bore insult. "Well, I beg your pardon." The concession was brief. Collins's eyebrows slid together in malicious knots. "I—ah, really! You know how it is, Nicholas—or should I say Mr. Randall now?"

"Don't be foolish," snapped Randall, recalling Chink Chalmers's one-two punch with a certain yearning.

"But you used to be father's valet," extrapolated Easton. "Gracious, how did you—"

Randall laughed again, shivering as he finished.

"Business," he offered shortly.

Collins blundered on.

"A member of the Kiandaga Club! My goodness, that's a jump! I suppose, Nicholas, you're not anxious to have them know too much about the past. Well, don't worry—I'm only out here for a few days, and I won't say anything. Your secret is safe with me."

Nicholas felt the old-time heat mounting to his cheeks and burning in his eyes.

"Don't go to any trouble about it," he challenged. "What was a fact fifteen years ago remains a fact to-day, so far as I'm concerned. People realize that a man works most of his life. They don't worry how, as a general thing."

Collins turned pale.

"At any rate," he finished brusquely, "you don't need to worry about my saying anything."

He made a fidgety gesture with his right hand, but did not extend it. Turning abruptly, with no further word, he went off toward the cloak room.

Nicholas did not move. It was silly to take such a cub seriously, but it was all wrong that such a cub should have power to hurt him. He breathed a curse upon people who fostered the idea that an in-

trinsically inferior creature could be born superior to others.

Hard old fingers clamped upon his arm, and he found Dave Bunt at his side, chuckling.

"Well, say it," directed Dave. "Say what you think. You've talked to him longer than any man in town, so you ought to have a better way of expressing your opinion."

"Do you mean Collins Easton?" asked Nicholas.

"Collins himself."

"Oh!"

Dave Bunt's chuckle became a hearty laugh.

"Still inarticulate!" he bubbled. "Still in the first stages of thinking him over! That's what everybody says first — 'Oh!' But go on, go on! I'm waiting for what follows. The pest has been in town about two days. He has a way of telling people that he came out here to carry away one of our young ladies. He grins as he says it, and tells how he met her on the Maine coast last summer, and how he immediately decided that she was the only woman in the world. Hell's fire, Nick, I'd as soon marry a piece of flypaper, if I was a girl!"

Nicholas shook his head.

"I'm afraid I'll disappoint you, Dave," he said. "The only word I can think of is 'hell.' The sequence then reads, 'Oh, hell!' That's what a taxicab driver who unbosomed his life story to me said when I told him he had been wrong in abandoning his wife. 'Oh, hell!' he said, in just the tone I mean."

Dave grunted.

"You either know too much or too little of Collins Easton," he declared.

IV

"I SHOULDN'T have let him get my goat," sighed Nicholas. "Why did I do it? Instinct, I guess. I've been hating him for years. He stands for everything that I despise, and for everything that worked on me when I was young. That must be it."

Nicholas had been driving his car in an outlying part of the city, far from the smoky central region where the clubhouse stood. He stopped before an old-fashioned building that was four stories high, with square and simple lines, resembling a small hotel. It was a hotel in all truth, for it sheltered the Jourdan family, an aggrega-

tion in which the people of that Western city took mirthful pride. The eldest son was forty years old, and long established in business. The youngest had a twin sister, and was in his early teens. Mounting from the youngest to the eldest was a flight of steps such as exists in the family of the illustrious Eddie Foy. Men said that the school fees paid by Philip Jourdan in his day would have made a fair-sized college endowment fund, if they could have been lumped together.

Entering, Randall received a curiously mixed impression. A magnificent Empire settee was decorated with a short overcoat, a rakish hat, and a copy of Wentworth's "Plane and Spherical Trigonometry." A pair of skates glittered on the lower ledge of a console. A knitted wool cap lay on an Irish point table cover. The bronze lamp above it had a cracked shade.

Four or five doorways were within view, and from each came a stream of light. From above and below, right and left, the buzz of voices was audible. Some one was playing a piano in the music room — Randall recognized the selection, if not the touch — and upstairs some one was whistling cheerily.

The butler, who looked harried and aged before his time, conducted the visitor to the music room.

"Mr. Randall, Miss Maria," he announced in due form.

Nicholas found his heartbeat accelerated. He entered the music room and was greeted by Maria Jourdan. She was of middle height. Her hair was brown in tone, with strands of clear straw color here and there. Her eyes were blue, with an appreciative light in them. She was five years younger than Nicholas.

He took her hand a trifle gingerly. He was a little in awe of her. He had acquired an easy manner for most people, but if Collins Easton represented all that he hated in life, Maria Jourdan stood for all that he liked. She was keen-witted and amiable. Her eyes saw the same things that he saw, and had the same ready twinkle. She had a talent for music. Altogether, she seemed just a little bit more than he dared hope for.

"The strategy has worked, I see," he began.

As he spoke, an urging force within him sent an impulse over his nervous system — a signal that it was ready to function.

"Beautifully," she answered. Her voice had the healthy zest of a child's. "I've been playing Bach, and I'm positive no one will come near me all evening. It scares them horribly!"

She went back to the piano bench.

"If I recall," said Nicholas, "it even scares me."

The urging force was impatient of this temporizing, and was repressed with difficulty. Nicholas was confused by it.

Maria was speaking, her head poised gracefully.

"I shall watch you closely. If you show the least sign of running away, I'll change to Beethoven!"

"Or anything that is on the player rolls," suggested Nicholas. "As long as you stick to plain flying, without stunts, I feel braver, you know."

"Bravery is essential in our house. You feel deserted and lonely here, as if you were lost in the stadium at a football game. You are glad to know that help is near!"

Nicholas joined her laughter.

"Seriously, I've often wondered how it feels when almost every one of you is away somewhere."

"Oh, that is ghostly—you have no idea; but it doesn't happen often. The twins are still in school, you know. They never go out, and while they are in the house seems full."

As she spoke, her eyes flashed gayly. The urging force took possession of Nicholas's heart and made it throb.

"Now!" said the force. "No more nonsense! Over the top, and the best of luck!"

Something fluttered in his throat and made his voice sound strange.

"I—I've been thinking of asking you to leave them all and settle somewhere alone—except for me, that is."

The urging force gave him an encouraging pat on the back. The girl's eyes lit with whimsical joy.

"I really believe I've been hoping you would think of that. Could you actually stand my piano—all evening?"

"I could have a study at the other end of the house, and go there while you were at the heavy stuff. You could sound a buzzer when you worked around to my kind."

She nodded emphatically.

"An ideal arrangement, Nicholas! We could have meals together, too."

"Of course. The servants could be trained to break things and make noises all over the place, so that you wouldn't be homesick."

"You are a true knight errant," she said. "I think I will let you rescue me."

She was looking at the Bach score as she spoke. He was no longer conscious of the urging force, no longer conscious of anything save the vigorous appeal of Maria. He put out his hand and touched her arm.

"Seriously, Maria?" His voice trembled. "I mean it—oh, how I mean it! Do you?"

The mischief faded from her smile and left it tremulous and searching. She nodded very slightly, and he gathered her in his arms. The piano uttered a few disconnected sounds as his body brushed the keys.

"Nicholas—yes," she whispered.

After a little, she disengaged herself, and her playful manner returned.

"Nicholas, just a minute. Let's go out in your car for this. You've no idea how they scent it upstairs, and how they love to peek and then to tease about it. They are positively deadly—especially the twins."

"Of course, of course," agreed Nicholas.

She went to her room for a wrap. While he waited in the entry hall, Nicholas heard a young man in the upper regions of the house begin to sing. The voice, harsh and off key, made him think of Collins Easton. He grimaced.

"You don't know what an outright nobody you're taking," he told Maria. "I must tell you, some time, and then you'll regret your generosity."

Her frank blue eyes inspected him and shone with approval.

"I know quite well what I'm doing, Mr. Randall!" she said.

V

TOWARD the dinner hour next day, Nicholas entered the Kiandaga Club. He was possessed by a joyous feeling of having removed a step from life, of being an island in its current. He watched people stream past, wondering whether they were bound and what pleasures they had, if any.

He had given the morning to the business of choosing Maria's ring, and had presented it to her when they met down town for luncheon. Of course, she had tried it on, and had immediately concealed it. In

accordance with good social usage, the engagement was to be a secret until every one would be guessing if it really existed, and would be trying to say which party given by which of her friends would announce it.

The doorman opened for Nicholas and replied to his "Good evening." Randall entered the lobby. Instantly two young men bounced up from a sofa and hurried toward him. It was as if his foot had touched a spring to release a double jumping jack.

He looked up in surprise. One of the two was Collins Easton, the other Kent Jourdan, Maria's younger brother. Kent was probably twenty-five, but looked younger. He was thin and quixotic.

"We want to see you," said Kent, as they came up. "We—"

"Immediately!" demanded Collins.

Their tone was hostile.

"I don't believe we'll have much trouble arranging an interview," said Nicholas.

"Please come this way," directed Kent, setting off toward the lounge, which was to the left of the lobby.

Randall hesitated for a moment, and then followed, slipping off his coat and carrying it on his arm.

The lounge was empty. Kent motioned Nicholas to a divan, but Nicholas was aroused. He drew up a side chair, placing himself so that Kent and Collins were forced to take the more awkward position, side by side, facing him. The one displayed something like stage fright, the other showed nothing more than bullet-headed Easton conceit.

"Well?" prompted Nicholas.

They began to speak together, looked at each other, and stopped abruptly. Finally Kent Jourdan was assigned to the keynote speech.

"I—" he began with taut lips. "I—that is, we—we want to know your intentions with regard to my sister."

"Your sister?"

Randall gave frown for frown.

"Yes, Nicholas," snapped Collins Easton, "your intentions toward Miss Maria."

This was blowing upon a live coal. True, the ash upon it had thickened, but its one-time heat had not diminished.

"Gracious!" mocked Nicholas. "Is she the young lady who brought you out here, Collins?"

Collins grew red.

"That does not concern you," he said

angrily. "We've asked a question. Answer it!"

Nicholas got to his feet. Ignoring Collins, he looked directly at Kent.

"If I feel it necessary to answer such a question," he proclaimed, "I will do it whenever I am ready, and I'll talk to people who have the right to hear me. Good evening!"

He turned away. Collins sprang up, caught his arm, and jerked at him with a maddening assumption of authority.

"Now see here!" he blustered. "You'd better understand that we won't have any nonsense from you. It is all right for you to come up in the world, but you must see that it's impossible for you to marry into a family like the Jourdans. I am their guest, and I won't have you—"

He stopped, cringing. Nicholas's eyes were aflame.

"Easton, mind your own business. Do you understand that? If you don't, I know of ways to make you. In the vulgar language of the streets, I'll knock your block off—again. Is that plain?"

"All right, all right!" Collins was almost hysterical. "You've said enough. I tell you, this will not stop here. You may be able to force your way into this club, but you'll find you can't force your way everywhere, you—ouch! Look out, or I'll call the police!"

Nicholas had made a step forward, and Collins had leaped back, tripping over a corner of the divan. He went sprawling upon the floor, his face gray, his hands trembling.

Nicholas eyed him. A mirthless smile came. He was tempted to fling a taunt at the cowering enemy, but second thought made clear the uselessness of it. He walked away, and, mounting to the second floor, entered the Round Table room.

Gradually he pulled himself together. It was no time to let emotion run. His future was challenged. He must keep cool.

What would come next? Undoubtedly a retreat to the Jourdan home and an attempt to arouse family feeling. He gave a disdainful snort. Collins could be trusted to find the most cowardly, underhand thing in the catalogue.

Nicholas considered calling Maria by telephone and telling her of the trouble, but rejected the idea. It would be like deliberately asking her to win confidence for him before his enemies could carry their

tale into the home. In a way it would be a confession of weakness. Well, his position might be weak, but he would never confess it.

Dave Bunt was not on hand, and the Round Table lacked its customary vivacity. Several men finished dinner and left the room. Others sprawled at their places, smoking. Late eaters began to appear and study the menu.

Nicholas dallied over his dessert, his mind wandering far from his body. Then, from the corner of his eye, he caught a nervous movement near the door, and saw some one with flushed cheeks and sleek hair walking to the edge of the table.

Nicholas stiffened. For a moment he debated a furious attack upon Collins. It would be easy to prevent what was about to happen; but it was far better to keep cool. He glanced at Collins with calm defiance and turned away, finding a moment in which to chuckle at the reddish undertint in his enemy's eye.

Collins was fighting dragons. He was exactly like his father, who wanted the universe destroyed whenever it did not give personal satisfaction.

"I don't know whether you men know it or not," rasped Collins, "but you're eating with a fellow who has worked his way in here under false pretenses!"

Nicholas took a final swallow of dessert, and found comfort in the action. Collins was pointing toward him. Tanned and ruddy faces followed the gesture, but he gave no sign that he heard. He did not so much as look up.

"He's not fit for membership in such a club as this!" shouted Collins. "I'm telling you, so you can take it up with your board of governors. He used to be a servant in my home. He did my father's valet work, and mine. That's what he is — a servant, nothing more, and he's here in your most exclusive club."

Nicholas leaned back, showing no concern. He sought the breast pocket of his dinner jacket, and brought forth his cigar case. Slowly, conscious that all eyes were on him, he pinched the end of a cigar, lit it, and replaced the case. He took a final sip of coffee. Then he got to his feet and left the room, looking neither to right nor left.

A murmur rose behind him.

"Did you see? Did you see?" asked Collins. "He didn't deny it! He was my father's valet. The blackguardly scoundrel

— a valet! He didn't dare say a word! He didn't dare!"

Nicholas heard no more as he passed down the stairs. He shuddered. He had carried it off well, but he felt as if he had been stripped naked before the men of the Round Table. To what purpose? By what right? To no purpose, and only by a coward's right to hit foul!

VI

At times Nicholas Randall's wrath was painful, generating nothing but hatred for Collins. At times it was dull, and allowed flurries of resentful thought to sweep his brain.

Maria! She might be loyal, she was loyal, but people were talking. They would talk for nine days. If ever the engagement was announced, they would talk for nine days more.

Eighteen days of talk were enough to change the course of a lifetime. Nine days were enough.

At the club some would be for him, some against, but probably most of the members would not care particularly. The board of governors would consider expelling him. Kent Jourdan would see to that. Perhaps they would decide Kent's way. That would depend upon what men were governors, and what mood predominated as they met.

Nicholas was in his apartment, seated in his favorite chair. Now and then he came dazedly out of his brooding and relighted the cigar which he invariably found clenched between the fingers of his right hand, stone cold. Beside him were his books and magazines. About him were the heavy-legged Louis Quatorze pieces he had collected when he first began to study period furniture.

He writhed in fury. He wasn't a climber or a pretender. All he asked of life was the right to do as well as possible, to enjoy what reward came to him, and to hold a place among capable men. There were hundreds at the fringe of society, toadies, bootlickers, who could never be disturbed in this way, because they had been careful to be snobbish in their choice of work.

But wait! His thought took a new line. Anger yielded to rising excitement.

Was that true? No, it was nonsense! He was thinking nonsense! He was pitying himself when he should be alert. A toady would not receive more consideration from society than Nicholas Randall.

Toadies were always toadies. Toadies were always despised, because they sought to go ahead by formula, and not by earning their advance.

Nicholas laughed softly. He had let Collins get his goat again; and, searching for that wandering animal, he had got into a slough of false thought. He had allowed himself to feel beaten when, if experience taught any truths at all, it taught that it was impossible for an able man to lose to an inept man, and that a house built upon a solid foundation could not fall.

Dave Bunt had repeated a rumor that the Easton fortune had been lost, that only the family hauteur was left, and that Collins, in the first frenzy of shifting for himself, was clutching at straws of matrimony. He had pursued half a dozen New York heiresses, the story went on, and had been more or less politely thrown out of half a dozen New York homes. Now he was in the West, seeking another preserver—or, as Dave put it, a meal ticket. Wouldn't Kiandaga, Maria Jourdan, every one, consider that rumor and compare Collins with Nicholas as a man? Could Nicholas lose by such comparison?

Beaten? No, the fight was only half over, and was half won!

VII

THE Chinese servant went to the entry and admitted some one—a man, who said, in a rattling, powerful voice:

"I want to see Mr. Randall."

Nicholas sprang to his feet eagerly. It was Dave Bunt.

"I came about this Easton matter," growled Dave, with his eyes on the floor. "What a row that cub has made—what a row!"

"I suppose so," said Nicholas. "What will they do?"

"Do? Oh, I suppose the board of governors will take it up. I'm pretty sure I know what they'll do; but you can't be absolutely sure."

Dave, more fiery, more tousled than ever, paced the floor. Nicholas's heart was warmed by the old fellow's concern.

"Of course," he admitted frankly, "what Easton says is true. I did do house-work—at least, I was paid to do it—for a year, beginning when I was nineteen."

"What of it?" shouted Bunt. "What of it? Hell's fire, I used to be a blacksmith's helper, and general all-round assist-

ant to Satan, besides. That was after I had driven a horse car four years, and had got tired of freezing to death every winter; and no little squib is going around throwing it up to me. Why didn't you smash him?"

"I did, once," replied Nicholas. "It didn't do any good—you can see that."

"Honestly? When?"

"When I resigned from my position at his home. A boy at school taught me a one-two punch, and I one-twoed him."

"Ho! Ho!" gloated Dave Bunt. "Oh, by thunder! Here, Nick, I'll tell you what we'll do. I'll call Frank Turner at the *Star*, and give him the story. I'll tell him about that one-two punch, and say that Easton's trying to get you for revenge. I'll tell Frank to go wild on it, and to put the question before the public. Democracy stuff—is an American who's fought his way from the bottom to be thrown down by snobs on top? That's the idea! Frank will make such a devilish row that the board won't dare to ask for your resignation. That's the thing, Nick—fight 'em! We'll fight them till they say enough!"

Nicholas shook his head.

"It would work, probably; but, Dave, things like this—Kiandaga and all—don't mean anything if you force people to give them to you. I was elected to the club because men liked me. I don't want to stay in spite of them."

Dave Bunt swore.

"Get those big ideas out of your head! People like to be made to do things. They respect you."

Again Nicholas shook his head.

"I don't want it that way."

Dave frowned, ruffling his hair.

"What made that little idiot do such a thing? Damn him, is he trying to run this whole town?"

Nicholas smiled.

"I seem to have stepped on his toes. Dave, this is between us—I carried off the young lady he meant to carry off."

Dave's mouth opened.

"Miss Jourdan?" he exclaimed. "She was his game! And you—honestly? Oh, Nick, you're a bear! Wait till I tell this—they'll give you a medal!"

"But you can't tell it," reminded Nicholas. "I told you in strict confidence. You must let her make her own announcement, you know."

Dave ruffled his hair and choked his laughter.

"Phew!" he muttered. "Did she know your story—your past, as they say?"

"No," replied Nicholas. "He met Dave's eye squarely. "I hadn't told her. I hinted at it, of course, but I didn't make too much of it. It—all this was just lately, and I wasn't reciting my black marks."

"Damn!" swore Dave. "See here, Nick, you've got to fight! You owe it to her. You've got to do something!"

"I'm going to," declared Nicholas. "I've just decided—but you won't approve of it."

"What is it? Something damned noble, I suppose."

"Noble from the point of giving me my best chance to win. I'm going to get out of sight for a few days."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm going away—for a week, probably—whereabouts unknown."

"That's suicide! That's insane! It gives them every chance to murder your reputation and dispose of the remains. You won't be able to say a word!"

Nicholas laughed quietly.

"Did you ever see an army court-martial, Dave? No? Well, it's a funny thing. In a court-martial it's almost impossible to convict the accused man as long as he keeps silent. The prosecution, you know, has to prove everything beyond all doubt, and there's nearly always a doubt as long as the man keeps silent; but let the poor fellow try to testify, or make a statement in his own behalf, and he's done. He talks himself into prison. Any army man will tell you that."

"I don't see the point."

"Don't you? Well, Collins has had his say. If I make a reply—to any one, mind you—it gives something to analyze, and it may be analyzed favorably or unfavorably. If I say nothing, people have nothing to go on but what they know of me. Dave, the hardest thing to beat in this world is a silent man."

Dave pondered.

"By thunder, you might be right; but it's only theory."

"I've got to adopt some theory."

Dave made ready to leave.

"If you've set your ideas in concrete, I'll stop arguing. I'll help any way I can."

"Will you? Then tell them I wouldn't say a word. Tell them that when you mentioned it, I just laughed. I wouldn't take Easton seriously."

"I'll say it," agreed Dave, extending his hand. "I'll say that, all right!"

VIII

A LETTER to Maria was necessary. Nicholas found it the most difficult feature of his defense, and did not finish it until past midnight:

DEAR MARIA:

Collins Easton, whom I knew long ago, has decided to make trouble for me. Because I feel that it will be better for all concerned to allow him to do so without interference, I am going away for a few days—not more than a week. I am sure a week will be sufficient.

I only hope that the trouble will cause you no pain. I am sure you still believe in me, but you will have to hear accusations that I ran away. If you can stand them for a few days, you will see that I merely decided to fight at long range.

I tried close quarters with Collins when we were both nineteen, and the result was not conclusive. I am pretty sure it will be this time.

Please believe in me, Maria, and believe in my love.

Sincerely,

NICHOLAS.

P. S.—I've already admitted to you that I'm a hopeless nobody, but I see no need of discussing it in public.

He read it again and again, and finally sealed it with a rapid gesture.

"I hope I'm right!" he groaned. "I hope I'm right!"

Leaving instructions to forward no mail, Nicholas went away by an early train and covered the territory where his stores lay. His torn mind surprised him by producing uncanny business inspirations. In one headquarters he outlined the copy for a series of advertisements that made the agency acclaim him as a genius. In another he sketched a selling plan that was used for months afterward.

It was hard to keep from writing or telephoning to Maria. Things that should have gone into his letter were constantly coming to mind, horrifying him, but he realized that it was probably better not to say them. Maria needed time to think, as well as the others. If Collins was constantly trying to sway her, any counterpleading by Nicholas might only be an added annoyance.

When he returned to his apartment, he found the end table beside his favorite chair cleared of books and periodicals and given to a little heap of mail. He sorted through it, and his fingers became slightly numb as he did so.

Finally he sat with three letters in his

lap. Two were from Maria—one dated the evening of the denunciation, the other several days later. The third was ominous and imposing, inclosed in a brown envelope postmarked on the day preceding his return. The single word "Kiandaga" was printed in the upper left-hand corner.

Nicholas began to tremble. He weighed the first letter from Maria in his fingers, tore away the flap, and set it down. He feverishly went through the heap on his table. No, there was no package that might inclose her ring. She was probably keeping the ring.

His throat went dry as he tried to frame the words she had written:

DEAR NICHOLAS:

I am greatly disappointed in you. I want you to come and see me the first thing in the morning. Don't mind how early. We are up at seven, so come as soon as you receive this.

Yours,
MARIA.

That was written on the night of Collins Easton's attack on Nicholas. Disappointed? What did that mean?

But—oh, bother! What was her second thought? What was in the other letter? He tore away the envelope and let it fall to the floor. He read:

DEAR NICHOLAS:

You're something of a wonder at handling miserable situations. At first I was absolutely disgusted because you didn't stay and thrash him; and then I saw your silence and your reputation thrash him most satisfactorily.

I have all of Bach piled on the piano, Nicholas; so don't fail to come and see me the minute you get home. I will tell you all about everything.

Ever yours,

MARIA.

P. S.—You may be interested to know that Mr. Easton was suddenly called home the day before yesterday. He talked until we were all tired of listening to him, and finally he realized it.

Nicholas sprang to his feet and started from the room. Then he turned back and took up the imposing brown envelope of Kiandaga. On his way to the hall he opened it, glanced at the folded paper it contained, and burst into laughter.

The letter from Kiandaga was in the form of a printed slip. It was the bill for the next quarter's dues.

THE MERRY MONTH

THE last snow melts, the last March winds are still;
Softly the sunshine smolders on the hill;
The birds are back, the river sings once more,
And lilacs crowd with scent the open door.

For May it is, and all my heart is May,
For I shall see my lady every day!
Winter no more shall keep us twain apart,
But in the summer woodlands, heart to heart,

On velvet mosses, where the bosky trees
Make for our love imperial canopies,
We shall lie soft and hear the wild birds sing,
The constant minstrels of eternal spring.

And when at sunset with full hearts we go
Home to the village chimneys there below,
We shall take happy music for our dreams,
Made out of talking leaves and laughing streams.

Night with soft airs and stars about our sleep
Shall lull us into valleys far and deep;
Nor shall we fear to face the lonely day,
For the last snow is gone, and this is May!

Hamilton Russell

The Warmed-Over Baby

THE STORY OF AN EVENTFUL DAY IN THE LIVES OF MR. AND
MRS. JOSEPH JORKINS AND OF GUTTERSNIPE,
THE MONGREL PUP

By Raymond S. Harris

SUPPOSE you were a charming young widow, about to remarry. Suppose you had a darling baby girl, left over from your first marriage. Suppose your husband-to-be, an orphan with no one to guide him except a kiln-dried old uncle, simply misunderstood all babies, and called them—just imagine!—“disfiguring blots on the bright page of matrimony.” Suppose all this—would you tell him about your little girl?

Minnie Goring didn’t. She met Joseph Jorkins at a bridge party not attended by the baby, and fell in love with him at first sight. That same evening the hostess’s infant son, pricked on by a misplaced safety pin, soured the milk of sociability and so curdled Joseph’s complacency that he twice trumped his partner’s trick. So, while he accompanied Mrs. Goring home, Mr. Jorkins aired his views on babies.

Mrs. Goring, therefore, was amply forewarned; but, like a mother, she wanted her baby. Like a widow, she wanted Charles. Like a woman, she felt that somehow or other she would manage to get both.

Then, too, Mrs. Goring had had one husband, and from one husband any woman can learn the instinctive prejudices of the possessive male. One of these is a stubborn aversion to warmed over babies. Some husbands like their babies served plain, without fixings, garnishes, or frosting to hide their offspring’s glorious outlines. Others prefer them peppery, perhaps with caper sauce, and scalloped, primped, and fluffed around the edges; but alas, how few enjoy warmed-over babies!

Call them cunning croquettes, if you wish. Call them *émincé* of angels, if you so desire; but to most men they will be but

hash—and hash, ye gods of jealousy and love, left over from some other fellow’s banquet!

Mrs. Goring meant to tell Joseph about it, very frankly, before the wedding, but events dissuaded her.

One afternoon she was wheeling her baby in its go-cart, when Joseph came along, attended by that soured and impossible old bachelor uncle. A bevy of busy youngsters were concocting mud pastry on the narrow sidewalk between the rapidly approaching parties. A little girl thrust an eager fist into a pile of dust, filled the depression with water from a sprinkling pot, and stirred the dough with her fingers. A fly alighted upon her forehead, and she brushed it away, leaving streaks of mud across her unmindful face. Joseph and his uncle noted the scene with disgust, and carefully picked their way around it, Joseph’s features mirroring the expression of repugnance and outraged primness worn by Uncle Horace.

By this time Mrs. Goring and the go-cart had made good their retreat up a private walk. From behind a flowering bush the mother watched the inconsequential incident with a sinking heart.

“His only flaw!” she murmured, looking with reproachful fondness at the shuddering back of her *fiancé*.

One evening she placed a newly purchased red bulb in the lamp at the end of the confidential davenport, and turned out all the other lights. Just the moment when an infatuated young man, with an arm around his almost wife, and with the warm tendrils of her hair caressing his crooning mouth, should agree to anything, she said, as if her thoughts were dreaming far away:

"I called on Mrs. Afton to-day, darling. How a little child lights up a home!"

"Dirties it up, you mean!" Charles growled, just as if she hadn't bought that red bulb at all.

A shiver passed through Mrs. Goring.

"But, honey," she protested, "what is home without children?"

"Paradise!" Joseph parroted.

"It's just that you don't know!" Mrs. Goring cried.

Coming to think it over, that was the explanation, she decided later, while she watched her little Josephine wrestling with a rattle. Her intended husband didn't know—and, above all, he didn't know little Josephine. She caught the wriggling infant in her arms, while its arms waved like semaphores.

"Babies are just babies," she announced, kissing the sticky bit of protoplasm with the uncontrolled enthusiasm at which those who are not parents look with blank dismay; "but *you*, little angel! You'd awaken the finest feelings of any human heart!"

Mrs. Goring started another amorous attack upon her small daughter, but stopped in mid assault, and fixed an inspired stare upon the baby's bassinet. Then she absently put the child down, and stood for minutes gazing fixedly at nothing in particular, but thinking, thinking. Finally she gave little Josephine a hurried peck, and, with a triumphant gurgle, ran off into her bedroom to try on some last bit of trouser finery.

The woman in the widowed mother had asserted herself. Mrs. Goring felt that after all she was going to have three hearts beat as two.

II

LET US now imagine that we are on the way to the Jorkins-Goring nuptials, but with plenty of time to loiter in another part of town and look into a pretentious back garden, just to the rear of the most ornate dwelling in Peaksville. Gazing over the hedge, let us meet young Rollo, only and demon son of Mr. and Mrs. C. Olmstead Mills, one of the city's first—and last—families. First in wealth, that is, and last to part with any of it.

Rollo is blowing bubbles, but already he is beginning to tire of the pastime. One of the bubbles has just burst and flicked a bit of soapy water into Rollo's eye, and the

youth is ready to quit. His idea of fun is to cause as much pain as possible, but not to himself.

Just as Rollo is considering dumping the contents of the soap bowl upon a row of nasturtiums, in the hope that the plants may die and get the gardener into trouble, a street dog—one of the irresponsible pups that bring joy into the hearts of most boys, the light-hearted canine urchins that haven't enough human understanding to be sad—enters through a hole in the hedge, and fixes Rollo with its perpetually beaming eyes.

Rollo whistles, and the pup takes the familiar sound at its face value. He dashes around Rollo, and fawns upon him. Rollo promptly blows bubbles into the pup's face; but the little dog takes this as a joke, and barks the bubbles into oblivion.

Rollo is disappointed, and has a foot poised to assault the dog in the usual crude fashion, when he thinks of the cake of toilet soap. Pups will chew anything, and Rollo remembers the acrid taste of soap when administered as an antidote to an attack of swear words. Calling Guttersnipe with deceptively cajoling words, he offers him the dripping bar. The pup sniffs at it once, and drops down with it between his paws, to gnaw gleefully at the tasty morsel.

His mouth frothy with foam, the pup looks up with comradely pleasure. With a snort of disgust, Rollo snatches the cake away; but Guttersnipe has had hardly a taste of the delicacy. He springs into the air for the prize, his teeth skinning Rollo's knuckles. The boy backs away, and the pup pursues him, bounding and snapping for the withheld treasure. Rollo starts to run and to blubber.

At this moment Mrs. C. Olmstead Mills comes out on the terrace to see what her only child is doing. She discovers him in frightened flight, while a mad dog, its clashing jaws flecked with foam, springs ferociously at him.

"A mad dog is biting our Rollo!" Mrs. Mills screams, her majestic form frozen with horror.

Almost unable to believe this good fortune, the harassed gardener looks up from his flower bed and covertly yells:

"Hoo-ray!"

His voice smothered by the window pane, the butler gazes out hopefully and growls vindictively:

"Bite 'im agin for me!"

Ryan, the chauffeur, rolls from under the limousine at the back of the garden, and, sitting up, calls encouragingly, but not too loudly:

"Jump fer his windpipe, me fine puppy!"

But Mrs. Mills is in action. She sweeps down into the engagement, and, disregarding her own safety, gathers the now frightened brat into her ample arms. Holding him as high as possible, she calls on the two men in the garden. With an assumption of enthusiasm they start after the dog. The butler is peremptorily summoned down, and he joins in the round-up.

Through the flower beds they crash. Ryan dives into an imported shrub, and leaves it a ruin. The pup, hysterical with joy, allows them to close in, then bounds away; but in his enthusiasm he doesn't take note of a wire screening up which some roses are climbing. He swerves into it and loses his footing, and when he recovers he finds Ryan's big hands around his throat. The butler gets one hind leg, the gardener holds taut the other.

Mrs. Mills, still supporting Rollo out of harm's way, directs the chauffeur:

"Ryan, take that animal to the pound, and have it destroyed!"

Bearing the dog between them, the three men make their way heavily to the limousine, cast their burden into the car, and slam the door quickly. Ryan sourly gets into his place, and pulls out of the yard, bound for the city pound.

After one hopeful look out of the window, Guttersnipe realizes the possibilities of his magnificent new surroundings. Settling himself on the floor, he begins chewing one corner of the rug. The death tumbler lumbers on its way.

Breathing heavily from shock, Mrs. Mills carries her darling into the house, past her disheveled servitors. Rollo, even though being transported in a horizontal position, manages to heave the cake of soap so deftly that it catches the butler in the eye.

Sputtering with rage and with the pain of the stinging soap, the butler asks the gardener piteously:

"W'y didn't we 'old back and give the hanimal a real chance?"

So, dabbing at his eye, he passes on to resume his household duties, while the gardener turns to appraise the wreck of his garden.

And, there being nothing more to interest us, let us continue on our way—but not

to the wedding, alas! We have lingered too long, and the ceremony is over.

III

MR. AND MRS. JOSEPH JORKINS elected to honeymoon in their own new bungalow, which they had named the Nest, rather than on Pullmans and as transient guests in some hymeneal hotel.

"Our little home will always be sacred to us," Mrs. Jorkins had put it, "for the first hours we spend there—the first sweet hours of the many we will know within its walls!"

Joseph was quite taken with the thought. Since that decision, Mrs. Jorkins had made another, a supplementary one. Because of it, a white-gowned nurse emerged from the Jorkins home, consulting her watch, even while the newly wedded pair were motoring toward the bungalow. She glanced hastily up and down the street and hurried away.

A few moments later the bridal car drew up in front of the Nest. With meticulous care the fond bridegroom assisted his wife to alight, every nerve intent upon getting her safely to the sidewalk; but even as the bride bestowed upon him a warm and wifely smile, she envisaged the street corner down the block, and saw a white-gowned figure wave a signal ere it disappeared.

"Deary," said Mrs. Jorkins, as they floated up the pathway, "I have a surprise for you in there—a great, wonderful surprise. I'm going to take a short walk, and let you discover it for yourself. Now don't protest! It's something I have just set my heart on—something inexpressibly dear and sweet to me."

She gave her husband a gentle push through the opening door.

"It's going to mean the world to you," she said with arch vigor. "When I return, in fifteen minutes, I know you will be a changed man!"

Summoning a dazzling smile, she waved a gay farewell and pulled the door shut. Joseph heard her cross the porch, and heard the patter of her feet as she ran down the steps. Then he was alone—alone and wondering in the quiet of the Nest.

If the transaction had not been so swiftly consummated, he would have objected. He might have refused to be a party to it. Even now he made a futile movement toward the door; but Minnie was far down the street, hurrying away. He stopped,

still puzzled by his bride's abrupt departure, and pondered. Then he turned, frowning a little, and gave the entrance hall an appraising survey.

Everything was as they had left it the day before. There was no surprise bundle in sight. He stepped to the arched entrance to the broad living room, and gave it a resentful examination. No bundle there, no new piece of furnishing!

Suddenly a humorous phase of the absurd situation presented itself.

"That's one on Minnie!" he cackled. "This wonderful present, whatever it is, hasn't been delivered!"

His outburst broke the silence. Hard on its last syllable, as if to give it the lie, there came a sound from the bedroom that seemed most like—

"Ba-a-a-a!"

"It's a sheep!" Joseph ejaculated.

He gazed, astounded, at the bedroom door. From it issued a second quavering note. This time the sound seemed to be:

"Mam-mam!"

"Why, there's a goat in the house!" the bridegroom proclaimed.

Bristling, he strode to the door, hesitated on the threshold, and approached with diminishing speed a pink-enveloped basket set in the center of the floor. A live something wriggled in a haze of lace and ribbons. Bending over, Joseph saw that it was a baby.

He staggered back and sat down heavily on a chair that happened to catch him just behind the knees.

"Some one's left a foundling here!" he cried tragically.

Minnie would be back almost any minute—back to the Nest, in which they had so often pictured themselves settling down to the first fluttering ecstasy of mating—to find this foreign fledgling there ahead of them, vociferously demanding food and midnight solicitude!

With what growing fever of impatience had Joseph watched each shingle nailed to the Nest, until at last it was ready, lined with warm feathers, for their amorous occupancy! After his months of gleeful expectancy, were all his plans for their first delicious intimacy to be wrecked by this farcical intruder?

With an unintelligible outcry of protest and impatience, he sprang over to the basket, lifted the child, with a blue-bordered blanket dangling to the floor, and turned

wildly around the room, looking for a place—any place—to hide it, to get it out of the way. He kicked the bassinet under the bed. Then he rushed out into the kitchen, where he thought of the cellar, abandoned it, considered the garage, gave it up, and then ran into the living room with his burden.

He had to get rid of the thing, and do it at once, before Minnie returned. Cursing with impatience, he flung open the front door, slammed it behind him, and plunged down the steps. A few seconds later he had scuttled around the corner, bound for any place in which a honeymoon-blighting baby might be deposited.

Joseph covered the first block at a rapid lop, bent on escaping from the neighborhood of the Nest. At the first cross street he glanced unseeing up and down, but kept straight on, gradually slowing to a dog trot.

Safely away from the house, the problem of quickly ridding himself of the bundle and getting back before Minnie returned asserted itself. He stopped in front of a quiet residence, its broad porch suggesting hospitality; but as he put his hand on the gate a woman's face appeared at a window, and he turned away, made a pretense of shifting the baby's position, and continued on at a rapid walk.

In the next block there was a small up-town business center—the unbeautiful but convenient huddle of stores that crops up here and there in residence districts. Joseph scanned the store fronts feverishly, looked agitatedly across the street, and found a limousine in his line of vision, drawn up at the curb. He pivoted to the right, crossed the street, and paused for a moment at the initialed door of the ornate vehicle.

In proud monogram on its shining surface were the initials "C. O. M.," and Joseph recognized this as one of the motors of the wealthy Mills family. What a find for a foundling! He peered straight through the plate glass windows, and saw the chauffeur's back as that phlegmatic functionary loitered with the tobacco vendor. The bridegroom opened the limousine door, swung a quick, guilty glance around—and found a pair of baby arms clasping his neck, while baby lips gave him a warm, wet kiss.

Shuddering, Joseph thrust the child from him, rolled it in its blanket, and

dropped it on the floor of the car. Closing the door, he walked around the vehicle, put his hands in his pockets, and sauntered along the sidewalk, whistling a whistle that was only a windy exhaust.

There was a quick clatter on the pavement as the chauffeur hustled out. Joseph dodged into the entrance of a florist's shop, and watched through the angle of the show windows as the car got under way and disappeared. Then he wiped off the baby's too moist salute, and continued rubbing his cheek thoughtfully for a moment.

After all, the little brat was a human being; but wasn't it better off with the rich Millses than with the comparatively poor Jorkinses? Probably the Millses would adopt it, and would endow the child as one of their own.

Vastly relieved, the new husband now took up the matter of getting back into the Nest before his mate returned, or, if she had reached their home before him, of explaining his absence.

He became aware that he was looking into the window of a florist's shop, and that there was a rubber plant on display there. How opportune! He hurried into the interior, and burst out with the rubber plant held in the crook of one arm. The very thing he had several times told Minnie he was going to get for the living room window!

A little farther on he burst out whistling. At the cheerful sound a cheerful mongrel pup, sprawled in the gutter, momentarily fixed a hopeful eye on Joseph, and then returned to the worrying of a pink knitted something that he was chewing.

For Joseph had not seen, as he opened the limousine door, and while he glanced watchfully around, that a blotched yellow dog had slipped out to the street. He had not noticed, also, that when he broke the baby's affectionate hold, and, rolling her in her blanket, thrust her into the car, a gorgeous sock dropped from one pink foot—a pink sock striped with blue, betasseled, and monogrammed with the initials "J. G." The pup had noticed it, and, seizing the affair, romped out into the street, shaking it gayly.

So Guttersnipe began an aimless career with little Josephine's bootie.

Little Josephine we leave rumbling on in the Mills limousine, bound for the city pound. For the time being we will follow Joseph Jorkins, who, having straightened

out the temporary kink in his honeymoon plans, is hastening toward the Nest, with a rubber plant in his arms.

IV

JOSEPH was sure that Minnie must have returned by this time. Determined to carry off the matter of his absence, he threw open the front door and gave a gay little rush into the interior.

He stumbled over his wife's hat and a portière torn down from the gridded archway leading into the front room. He barely saved the rubber plant from destruction. When he had straightened up, and had assured himself that the plant was intact, he resumed as much of his smile as was possible on such short notice, and looked about for Minnie.

First of all he saw the sofa overturned on its back, with its legs rigid in the air. Next his eyes took in the Japanese screen, flat on the floor and speared by an andiron. Near it was the sectional bookcase, lying on its face in front of the corner across which, after many arguments, it had been stationed. Bits of broken glass were spewed out from under it, and its sections were disjoined.

"She thought I had deserted her!" Joseph said slowly.

He was appalled by the evidence of his wife's extreme perturbation, but he was already a husband.

"Deary!" he cried. "Sweet! I have brought you a nice rubber plant!"

Holding it before him, he went with ingratiating haste to the bedroom. At the door he halted, gaping with horror.

Here was the climax of disorder. It was evident that the full force of Minnie's explosive search had spent itself here, and that the scene in the living room represented only the subsidence of the storm. True, the bassinet had been rescued from beneath the bed, and placed again in the center of the floor; but the bed itself was a wreck. Covers and mattress had been torn from it and thrown into a corner. The bureau, one of the most treasured adornments of the new home, had been yanked aside, and it leaned, half prostrate, through a window pane. The two deep bottom drawers in Joseph's chiffonier had been pulled out on the floor, and, as the result of a lightning journey through them, his new nuptial haberdashery was scattered about the room.

Every article in the boudoir spoke of wild, uncontrolled, mad, despairing haste. The desolation, the uncanny quiet, the evidence of shrieking frenzy, and the sense of catastrophe, suddenly turned the bridegroom's heart to ice.

"Minnie!" he shouted wildly.

He whirled and ran into the kitchen, where the cellar door gaped open.

"Minnie!" he screamed down into the blackness.

Utter silence.

"Something terrible has happened!" he wailed.

On quaking legs he returned to the dining room. Here, with a mechanical habit of order, he raised the library table to an upright position. The act brought the rubber plant to his attention. With a pathetic hope he placed the pot on the table, and stood back, regarding it with a mask of interest, while he wrung his hands in agony.

Then with an inarticulate bellow he threw out his arms, rushed to the door, clattered down the steps, and started with a labored loping up the street, panting as if he had been running for miles.

V

"GET your net out!" Ryan called, as he rolled into the yard of the city pound. "There's a dangerous animal in here that was bitin' a boy!"

"Pete! Sam!" called the superintendent, briskly leaving his post by the door. "Bring the net! We got a wild one!"

There followed a minute of hulking haste. Then they had the net spread around the door of the car, which Pete pulled open quickly. Nothing happened.

Sam ran around to the other side of the motor, banged on the door, and yelled. Still nothing came out.

Peering in, the superintendent saw a bundle of clothing on the floor.

"He's hidin'!" he announced. "Here, Pete, back me up with that club while I go in after him!"

Reaching swiftly in, he gathered the ends of the blanket together, swept the bundle out, and laid it none too gently on the ground.

"Stand by with the net!" he ordered huskily.

He cautiously assembled the ends of the cloth, and quickly pulled one segment aside. A baby's bare pink foot popped out, and the superintendent grabbed it with

lightning speed. Through his galvanized grasp the toes wriggled cheerfully.

"It didn't have no blanket around it," said Ryan, puzzled, from his perch on the seat.

The dazed superintendent slowly opened the blanket, and disclosed Josephine blinking up at them after her nap. Pete suddenly remembered the club he was carrying, and hastily put it behind him, as if some one might accuse him of using it on a baby. Sam looked emptily into the empty car.

Deliberately wrapping up the bundle, the superintendent slowly arose and strolled over to Ryan.

"Havin' a lot of fun with the guys at the pound, ain't ye?" he said, with a grim assumption of pleasant badinage.

Ryan steadied himself to keep from toppling off the seat.

"It ain't the same one!" he enunciated huskily.

With a great air of going nowhere in particular, but never taking his eyes off the sweating chauffeur, Sam made his way around to the other side of the car, and stood there, hitching up his trousers.

"And who did this animal bite?" the superintendent asked in liquid tones, barring his teeth in a smile.

Little Josephine yawned.

"This kid can't bite nothin'!" Pete called out excitedly. "Look at its teeth—it ain't got none!"

His superior ignored this interruption. Suddenly his face grew purple, and, shaking with rage, he roared:

"Who did it bite, I say?"

Ryan began to plead.

"It was a dog," he explained feverishly, looking from one forbidding countenance to the other. "When I started, it was a dog. Mrs. Mills said to take it to the pound. I took it. I just took it. It chased her boy all around the garden, foamin' at the mouth, and bit 'im, and barked like—"

The superintendent turned quickly and walked away with his head down. Then he sprang back, and, his face almost touching that of the recoiling chauffeur, he yelled:

"You mean to keep on tellin' me this kid bit and barked?"

"It was the dog!" Ryan screamed.

Pete edged up close.

"You're holdin' the kid," he remarked to his boss. "I want first swipe at this funny guy!"

The superintendent stuck out an arm and swept his assistant back.

"You take this dog-faced kid and git!" he ordered, holding Ryan with an icy eye. "If you ever come back, I'll bark at you and bite you, and I'm foamin' at the mouth right now!"

Ryan caught the baby, threw in the gears, and left, from a standing start, on a wild, clawing run. He was doing forty miles an hour when he passed the confines of the poundman's domain.

Back in the yard the superintendent and his two helpers stood, tense, their blood turned to acid, in their nostrils the odor of burned rubber, and about their heads a blue cloud of gasoline vapor—fit color for their mood and their words.

VI

SOME married men take their joys elsewhere, but nearly all of them bring their troubles home to their wives.

Ryan did that now, instinctively. Here was a human problem, and Ryan, his seven children, and not a few of the neighbors, instinctively turned to Mary Ryan when they had their human problems to solve. Her ample person held resting room and to spare for a quartet of tired children, and upon her understanding sympathy her intimates in this humble neighborhood laid their troubled hearts, to lift them up quieted and at peace.

The seven scions of the Ryans were at dinner. At the foot of the long kitchen table sat Anastasia, the eldest. Upon either side were three boys. In front of each child was a bowl of bread and milk; and in each right hand a spoon, curbed by the Ryan code of table etiquette, was poised. As the chauffeur opened the door with his burden, Mrs. Ryan had just given the awaited permission:

"Now you can start—but remember each of you to eat without chokin'!"

Before the spoons could descend, the sight of their father arrested the arms of the eager diners. Mrs. Ryan drew in her breath sharply as she took in the tableau—her husband's whimpering charge, and his tragic face, already appealing to her for consolation and aid.

"Ryan!" she whispered. "Did you hurt a child?"

The chauffeur shook his head, and, huddling into a chair, began to unwind the tangled skein of his tale. During its course

Mrs. Ryan stood before him, her feet apart, her hands on her hips, and listened shrewdly. One by one, the seven children slid from their chairs and clustered around to hear, and to gaze at the bundle that was a baby.

Dispiritedly enough Ryan told his story of the baffling transformation—an unbelievable yarn of high magic wrought in broad daylight in a city street. It was halted and hobbled by the way it had been received at the city pound. Ryan left the straight course of the narrative a dozen times to bolster it here and buttress it there. Perspiration beaded his face. After all, this story of a dog changing to a baby might interest one's wife at a conjuring performance, but when told as gospel at home by her husband seemed doomed to failure. On, on, the picture of guilt.

"Ryan," his wife said briefly, "you forgot to kiss me."

Even while he complied with the salute, Ryan protested that he hadn't touched a drop.

"I didn't expect you to be believin' me," he added hopelessly.

"Why shouldn't I be believin' you?" his wife asked. "It's only that I was wonderin' had you taken a bit of bootleg somewhere, and didn't know yourself how you got the child."

Mrs. Ryan leaned over and looked long at little Josephine, who was gnawing a tiny pink fist. She exclaimed at the finery in which the waif was outfitted. Suddenly she put a hand on her husband's shoulder.

"You stopped some place between the house and the city pound!" she said with conviction.

Ryan started to shake his head. Then he recalled the halt at the cigar store.

"'Twas there it happened!" Mrs. Ryan announced.

She thought for a moment. Then she hurried into the next room, to reappear wearing a high black velvet hat, on which red roses jounced.

"This has got to be cleared up," she told her husband. "Here, give me that child! You're holding it as if it was a stick o' dynamite!"

Ryan breathed with relief.

"Of course I believe you," his wife went on, giving understanding touches to the baby's disarranged clothing. "Anastasia," she ordered, without looking up, "you'll

bring them baby things from the bottom drawer. Ryan, pour some milk in a pan and put it on to heat. You'll find a bottle put away with the others on the top shelf in the pantry."

When her husband returned from his errand, Mrs. Ryan went on, with her mouth full of safety pins.

"It's just that this needs clearing up," she said, turning the baby over briskly. "Ryan, your reputation as a decent man is at stake in this neighborhood unless this thing's settled, and settled quick. I tell you, something happened outside that cigar store!"

She was in full command now, and Ryan only a pitifully willing vassal.

"Now for you ~~children!~~" she ordered crisply, her tasks finished.

Ranged again on one side of the table were the three youngest, in order of age. Facing them were the older trio. Anastasia, the first-born, sat, second in command, at the foot of the table.

"Patrick," the mother said, looking steadily at the next to the youngest, and then at the baby of the family, "you take care of Terence."

"Yes, ma'am," Patrick accepted the charge.

Indicating the third youngest, and then Patrick, Mrs. Ryan directed:

"Aloysius, you take care of Patrick."

Aloysius agreed, even as Patrick had done.

"Ignatius, you take care of Aloysius. Michael, you take care of Ignatius. John, you take care of Michael. Anastasia, you take care of John."

She paused, and gave her daughter, senior of the Ryan brood, a look that commanded and yet was softened with a mother's trust.

"Anastasia," she resumed, "you'll be taken care of by yourself. No darter of Mary Ryan needs watching after."

For a moment she surveyed her flock, whose seven pairs of eyes were dutifully fixed upon her. For the first time her face threatened to betray her, and suddenly, but without a sound, she threw her apron over her head. She remained within the privacy of this homely sanctuary for a minute, during which the Ryans, big and small, sat silent. The stillness was broken only by the ticking of the big, undependable wooden clock, and by faint gurgling sounds from little Josephine and her bottle.

Emerging from her retreat as rapidly as she had entered it, Mrs. Ryan dabbed at her nose with a corner of her apron, untied the apron, and threw it over a chair. Going behind the rows of youngsters, she briskly bent back each head and gave each a mother's warm kiss.

Then, straightening, she rearranged her black velvet hat, on which the roses jostled as if shaken by a sudden storm. With quick efficiency she lifted up the baby, nodded briefly to her husband, and led the way out through the kitchen door.

Little did the young Ryans guess that their mother was starting forth in defense of the Ryan name, upon which, hitherto, no fleck or shadow of scandal had ever fallen; but, cuddled as they were so closely around her heart, they sensed its emotions, without knowing why. From Anastasia to littlest Terence, they felt a storm raging in their mother's bosom; though they could not know that it was a numbing arctic gale, whose icy blast howled through her heartstrings a shrieking question—where and how had Ryan got that baby?

Not only did the youthful Ryans recognize the gale's fury—they felt part of its chilling breath upon their cowering little persons. Starting with a sniff from Terence, their woe rose to a wail from Anastasia. As Mrs. Ryan went past the kitchen window, carrying the baby and followed by her husband, she kept step to the graduated expression of her children's love and concern; but she only compressed her lips, straightened her hat again with a free hand, and marched on.

Ryan, abashed and silent, drearily brought up the rear.

VII

UNCLE HORACE SMEDLEY was never late for an engagement, but he missed his nephew's wedding. This was due neither to Uncle Horace's dilatoriness nor to his procrastination. It was caused by the presence of graft in the drawbridge over Snell River. Every now and then the bridge refused to go straight, and people said that this was because it had been built crooked. In going wrong this day it held up the noon local between Evanstown and Peaksville—and Uncle Horace got to the church just in time to duck the last wildly flung old shoe, while the bridal car rattled off for the Nest.

Joseph Jorkins's mother used to say that

her brother was faultless to a fault. Uncle Horace lived up to that cryptic appraisement now. He knew his nephew's honeymoon plans, and he had made careful note of the address of the Nest. Shifting his wedding present from his right arm to his left, he started to deliver it in person. He had purchased a sturdy rubber plant to adorn a window of the honeymoon home, and he intended to see that it reached its destination.

In the Smedley bachelor cottage in Evanstown there were two rubber plants, one in each front window, and they had won that place by their staying qualities. There might be more beautiful plants in the world, but none more durable.

Pacing methodically on his way, Uncle Horace was turning into Fuller Street as Joseph, after getting rid of little Josephine, was discovering the havoc in his honeymoon home. And just as Mr. Smedley was pausing to light a stogy at the cigar store, the distraught Joseph came laboring in.

"Why, Joseph!" ejaculated Uncle Horace. "Where is your hat?"

Joseph turned first to his uncle, and then to the cigar vender. His face was pasty from shock.

"Have you seen my wife?" he asked, with pathetic entreaty. "She's left me!"

"Left you!" Uncle Smedley snapped. "Why, she only just got you!"

"She—she thought I'd deserted her," Joseph said dully, sagging against the counter.

The cigar vender's curiosity was on fire. He lived in a small world of small gossip, and loved to tell and be told. Guided by his searching queries, Joseph related the brief story of the home-coming, the discovery of the foundling, and the wreck of the Nest.

"What has happened," said Uncle Horace thoughtfully, "is that she saw you leaving with that child. You know how jealous a woman can be!"

The cigar dealer was examining Joseph critically.

"Pardon my asking it," he said finally, "but was there a woman in your life before you got married?"

"Only his mother," said Uncle Horace.

Joseph went to the shop entrance and looked helplessly up and down the street.

"Well," offered the hardy tobacconist, "my advice is, then—if you're sure there wasn't any other woman—that you'd better

get over to the Mills place, see if the kid wasn't taken there by the chauffeur, and then bring it over to your house and prove to your wife that you're on the level."

"You believe, then," asked Uncle Horace, "that she suspects my nephew of having had a past?"

The counselor narrowed his eyes and nodded.

"But where is my wife? How can I show her?" demanded Joseph.

"She'll come back," the dealer said loftily, "even if it's only to make sure you're good and lonesome without her!"

The other two thought this over for a moment. Then they nodded to each other, and, without a glance at their adviser, who was preening himself on his wisdom, they started for the Mills home, Uncle Horace still carrying his gift.

The sage tobacconist lighted a cigarette and leaned against the counter, thinking. He nodded wisely to himself now and then. After all, he did know something about the trailer sex.

VIII

Who is so happy as a mongrel pup? Humans may have their problems, and eventually they may solve them, but a puppy has no problems to solve. A mother with a baby is happy, but babies grow old and go away looking for a career. A woman with a career is happy, but careers grow stale, looking for a baby. A man with a golf club is happy, but when a man's real want is release and romance, the worm of suppressed desire nests in the niblick. A boy with a fish line is happy, but to-day's school sits on his conscience, and to-morrow's reckoning is the only thing he is sure to catch.

But a pup—just a mongrel pup—has no desires that he cannot gratify. He has no past and no future. For him everything in the world is gloriously transformed. A rubber boot is sweet in his mouth. A garbage pile has all the perfumes of Arabia. A stagnant puddle is nectar to his throat. A piece of decaying fish sits regally in his stomach. Some supernatural power guards and guides wastrel puppies, renders all things desirable, and makes all the world to bloom for them. If humans could but determine their souls' abiding places in advance, who so foolish as to choose the be-deviled existence of humanity, when one could become a pup, and live in paradise?

So we come again to Guttersnipe, for whom the fairy wand has waved and produced little Josephine's bootie. Its gay color, the tassel sporting from its top, its intoxicating tickle of soft woolen fibers against his mouth, combined to transport the pup into an exalted state of happiness.

He rolled over and over with the sock. He worried it between two uncertain fore-paws. He dropped it, and then stalked back, his fore quarters low and slinking, while his hind quarters publicly followed, with victoriously waving tail planted on their summit.

Springing upon the sock, he rolled from gutter to curb, winning again his savage triumph. Such is the kingdom of a dog's heaven—a tantalizing foe, and eternal victory over it.

IX

MRS. JORKINS stood on the corner, wringing her hands, and looking wildly in all directions for her baby. Gazing along Fuller Street, she saw gradually approaching her the ponderous form of Patrolman Lutz, of the local police.

Lutz was large, serious, and conscientious. He laid no claim to brilliant intellect, but held to the dogged belief that if a man does his duty, regardless of other considerations, he will win recognition and promotion eventually, if not now. So, when Mrs. Jorkins, hysterical and becoming disheveled, came toward him on a staggering run, Lutz was ready. The mother clutched feverishly at his breast, and at the hope that this solid representative of the law would solve her terrible problem.

"Where has my baby gone?" she wailed, as she finished her sob-choked story. "Where has my baby gone?"

Lutz looked up and down the street, as Mrs. Jorkins had done. Seeing nothing, he conducted her down to the corner, and both looked in all directions. Then the patrolman acted on a steady idea.

"Let's go down to the station," he said soothingly, "and tell the captain the whole story. That'll get the whole force looking for your kid."

They started accordingly.

"The trouble is, madam," he continued, "that you didn't handle the matter right. The proper time to come to the police is after you think of doing a thing, but before you do it."

Mrs. Jorkins moaned an assent. Then

she shrieked and pointed a rigid finger at a purposeless pup, which was coming toward them after its own fashion, shaking the pink gayness of little Josephine's sock, and running in happy but aimless circles.

"He's got my baby's bootie!" the distracted mother whispered, clutching at her throat as she remembered that pups are always hungry. "Do you think that beast has—"

At this awful thought she fainted in the patrolman's helpless arms. The dog had stopped in front of them. Dropping the sock for a moment, he backed off and waited for them to jump at it, his eyes shining, his whole tense form the very figure of expectancy, his slowly waving tail expressing a thrilling anticipation.

For a moment Lutz hesitated, looking from his unconscious charge to the pink piece of evidence lying under the dog's nose. Then he shifted Mrs. Jorkins to a strong position under his left arm, and, tiptoeing bulkily forward, made a sudden dive for the sock.

Guttersnipe was no fool. Indeed, in his own line, he was an expert. Just as the law's clutching hand was about to close on its property, he whisked it away. Bounding joyously back along the sidewalk, he paused and shook it temptingly at his baffled playmate.

The patrolman could not resist the lure. Packing Mrs. Jorkins away under his arm, her face upturned and her heels on the sidewalk, he started on a heavy, waddling run, alternately coaxing and threatening. The pup, transported with joy, tripping over his own puppy feet, scrambling out of the way, lingering to tease, and then bounding away at top speed, unconsciously led the pursuit toward the Mills home.

Possessed with the one idea that it was his duty to secure the evidence, Lutz pressed on with pachydermic panting, while Mrs. Jorkins mercifully remained deep in her swoon, as the heels of her white nuptial pumps bounced clatteringly along the pavement.

X

MRS. MILLS had summoned the family physician to demonstrate that Rollo was unbitten and unharmed, and, after a careful examination, the exquisite Dr. Armand so pronounced him.

Then, somewhat to the doctor's dismay, Mrs. Mills insisted upon taking him into

the back garden and going through the affair in detail. She had reached the point in the action where she gathered little Rollo's gangling form into her arms, when something sinister met her watchful eye. The mad dog was returning through the hedge, and this time its mouth was covered with a pink and doubtless bloody foam.

The matron was beside herself.

"The mad dog has come back to bite Rollo!" she shrieked, and, seizing the intended banquet in her arms, she charged with him into the house.

With what a glistening eye did Guttersnipe regard this intriguing performance! Dropping his sock for the time being, he bounded after the party, making threats at their ankles, and growling in a way to curdle the thinnest blood.

Dr. Armand found himself in a delicate position. He could not follow his impulse and lead the race, because Mrs. Mills was his most prominent and one of his most productive patients. Besides, in a case like this, a man is supposed to act the braver part. So the doctor, being compelled to bring up the rear, guarded his calves as best he could by swishing his bag at the pup, and by keeping his legs as far in front of him as the law of gravity would permit.

The whole thing was a delightfully unexpected gambol that thoroughly pleased the pup. Turning reluctantly from the door, which clanged against his eager nose, he stood and barked in a shriek of joy. What he said doubtless was:

"Automobile rides, cakes of soap to eat, policemen and doctors to play with—gosh! Why are people so good to me?"

Then he stiffened and fixed his kindling eye on a new playfellow, crawling through the hedge and advancing upon the pink sock.

Mrs. Jorkins had revived. Just as Patrolman Lutz was wondering if he, too, was about to faint from his exertions, she opened her eyes and moaned, and the policeman stopped and set her upon her feet. Drawing a dazed hand across her eyes, she suddenly became again a frenzied mother.

Not far ahead was the Mills hedge, and through it Guttersnipe, carrying the bootie, was making his way. Having accidentally reached the gateway to his glorious day, and remembering the delicious soap and the delightful auto ride after a romp with three men, he very naturally took that path to pleasure again.

Desperate and distracted, confused in her thoughts and uncertain in her movements, Mrs. Jorkins staggered to the abandoned sock. She reached down in time to feel Guttersnipe's tail brush her fingers, as he made a dash and bore the prize away around the side of the house.

With faltering steps she followed, masking her purpose with kind words, and staggering sudden onslaughts; but the pup knew his game by now, and he easily maintained his superiority at it.

The hedge parted almost to breaking as Lutz squeezed through and, breathing heavily, continued his tracking of the evidence. Weaving their way in a grotesque romp, the trio passed out of sight into the side garden.

By now the three agents of the city pound were speeding toward the Mills home. Mrs. Mills summoned the butler as she panted into the house, and shrieked:

"Phone them the mad dog is in the back garden, attacking us!"

Mention of the mighty Mills name put the pound on its mettle and into its automobile. Directed by the superintendent, and with clanging bell, the Black Maria of the canine criminal world put a kink in traffic as it demanded a clear way across the city.

At this same time the truant limousine, with the Ryans and little Josephine, was entering the back garden. They had paused at the cigar store only long enough to learn that two men seeking a baby had departed for the Mills place.

"That's where it'll be cleared up," Mrs. Ryan said with conviction. "It's from Mrs. Mills herself that I'll inquire. A woman can easily be mysterious, and sometimes a man can be mysterious; but there's nothing mysterious about a baby!"

"Don't be sharp with Mrs. Mills," Ryan cautioned uneasily. "I doubt she knows a thing about it, and you might be losing my job over this baby."

Mrs. Ryan snuffled, and vigorously rubbed a nose that was already cerise from rubbing.

"It's my peace of mind I'll be losing," she quavered, "till this be settled right."

With the car halted in the rear driveway, Mrs. Ryan prepared for her invasion of the Mills mansion.

"Ryan," she said, her mouth full of safety pins, "hand me that bag of baby things. Now," she went on, "I'll leave the

little one with you, so I can have a quiet talk. Don't think I'll spill any beans. I misdoubt that the lady knows a word about the baby, but between us we'll find out who does!"

Mrs. Ryan was in command of herself when she began her speech; but toward the end her voice quavered, and when she turned away and started for the back door her handkerchief was again in use.

Ryan stood on the lawn, holding little Josephine, and apprehensively watching his wife. When the back door opened and admitted her into the precinct of his employers, he could no longer hold himself in check. Carefully depositing the baby on the grass he hurried to the door, and, after rapping once, let himself in.

He had just disappeared when the city pound's automobile swung round the corner, the men getting out on the running board, with nets ready, and scanning the garden as they turned in at the rear driveway. Piling out of the car, the three skirmished cautiously through some shrubbery, assembled again, and looked over a low bush—straight into the cheerful eyes of little Josephine. She flapped her arms and gurgled.

The trio fell back as if the baby had pushed them. They were blanched with dismay, and then red with rage. Setting his jaw, the superintendent said hoarsely:

"Boys, they've hung that dog-faced kid on us again!"

For a moment the baffled dog catchers considered whether they should tell the Mills family, mighty though it might be, what they thought of it. Then they turned, and, stamping to their auto, slammed in the instruments of their scorned profession and retired, sulking, to the pound. Every cowering canine they passed, had he but known the facts, would have transcended his nature and given them the horse laugh.

Mrs. Mills, with one arm thrown protectively around Rollo, and still holding Dr. Armand on duty in case of casualties, was in the drawing-room when the maid whispered respectfully:

"Mrs. Ryan, ma'am, the chauffeur's wife, she's out in the kitchen. She wants to know can she see you about a baby that was found in our limousine."

"Well," said Mrs. Mills severely, "who left a baby in our limousine?"

"That's what she wants to ask you, ma'am."

At this moment the butler entered from the front hall, and Mrs. Mills peremptorily ordered:

"Hurley, find out what on earth Ryan's wife is talking about! Straighten it out, and never let me hear of it again!"

"Please, madam," Hurley supplemented, "there are two gentlemen at the front door as wants to know the same thing."

"What same thing?" Mrs. Mills asked, lifting her eyebrows.

"They wants to know, madam — they says—what's become of a baby as was in our limousine."

Mrs. Mills turned a helpless look toward the physician.

"Perhaps it would be well to have the two gentlemen meet the lady," he suggested, laughing in his professional manner.

"Exactly!" agreed the mistress of the house. "Hurley, conduct the two gentlemen to the kitchen, attend the conference, and then deliver me a brief résumé of the affair."

Dr. Armand and his most prominent patient laughed as heartily as cultivated persons may.

"Really," said Mrs. Mills, "I am much more interested in having that mad dog removed, and our term of imprisonment here brought to an end."

The physician said that he hoped imprisonment—should he ever go to jail—would prove as delightful. Mrs. Mills gurgled. Rollo endeavored to roll a billiard ball under Hurley's foot, failed, and went into a sulk. The butler went out to bring together those interested in little Josephine's whereabouts. Rollo foolishly seized his chance to stalk the butler.

Guttersnipe had left the best to the last. All that had occurred earlier in that glorious day was but preliminary to the final frenzy of mad happiness witnessed in the side garden.

Patrolman Lutz spread his legs wide, to bring him within reaching distance of the dog. Guttersnipe whisked between those legs and circled around and around them, tracing figure eights, looping the loop, doing the barrel roll, and chasing his tail with wild enthusiasm.

Mrs. Jorkins spread out her skirts to entrap the pup. Guttersnipe headed straight for the barricade, put on the brakes, skidded, sideswiped her foot, sped away on high, and sat down to scratch his right ear hysterically with his left hind foot—

whether there was a flea there or not; but he never lost possession of little Josephine's bootie.

Rushing with it around into the back garden, closely pursued by Mrs. Jorkins, he flashed past another pink bootie on the grass, and stopped so suddenly that he rolled over twice. The other pink bootie was enveloping a pink baby leg. And then Guttersnipe heard a strangled whoop, and saw one of his playful pals fall on the wearer of the pink bootie, smother it with kisses, strangle it with hugs, and almost drown it in tears.

Simultaneously Mrs. Mills and Dr. Armand heard a wild roar from the kitchen. Thinking that the mad dog had obtained admittance, they slammed shut the drawing-room doors and grabbed blunt instruments with which to protect themselves; but the roar came from Joseph Jorkins, for he and Uncle Horace and the rubber plant were escorted into the kitchen in time to witness, through the window, Mrs. Jorkins's scene with little Josephine.

Throwing open the back door at exactly the right moment to hit the prying Rollo with it, knocking him down and giving him an unsightly bump on his forehead and a decided pain where he struck the floor, Joseph leaped down to the garden and gathered his sodden wife into his thankful arms. Uncle Horace followed with his rubber plant, which he placed on the lawn while he grimly awaited the dénouement.

"Joe, darling!" Mrs. Jorkins crooned. "Don't you know whose baby it is?"

"Honestly I don't know, sweetheart," pleaded Joseph. "I never saw it before. I can't—"

"Silly!" gurgled Mrs. Jorkins. "Why, my husband, it is ours!"

Uncle Horace's jaw fell open at precisely the moment that Joseph's jaw fell open.

"You were so opposed to other babies, dear," Mrs. Jorkins continued softly, kissing Joseph again, "that foolishly—oh, so foolishly!—I could not tell you that I had a darling little baby for—us!"

"And you had it all the time?" Joe queried weakly.

"It was—er—left over from my first marriage," confessed Mrs. Jorkins.

The tears came again, and she sobbed.

Even as a thousand malignant microbes in a man's system battle against the influence of some beneficent toxin, so a thousand mean prejudices battled within Joseph Jorkins against the conquering toxin of love; and even as the microbes give way and flee, so did Joseph's prejudices vanish. He gathered his wife to his bosom.

"I will welcome it," he said, "as our little son—or daughter!"

Mrs. Jorkins clasped her husband in an embrace of undying love and vast relief.

"She was first named Henrietta, after Henry Goring," she breathed; "but several months ago I renamed her Josephine!"

Little Josephine's mother and stepfather—nay, her mother and father—turned to give her a glance of mutual affection.

"She has torn every leaf off that rubber plant," Mrs. Jorkins gasped. "I'm so sorry!"

"Tell her not to cry," Joseph Jorkins said nobly. "There's another rubber plant at home for her to play with!"

It was the supreme test, supremely met. Mrs. Joseph Jorkins gazed adoringly at her husband.

"Ryan," his wife was confiding to him, "I've been an awful fool!"

"Tis nothing!" Ryan answered, putting his arm as far as it would go around her. "You haven't flattered me so since the day you whispered 'Yis'!"

So the Jorkinses started, for the second time that day, toward the Nest. Little Josephine was fast asleep in her father's arms, for it was well past the hour for her afternoon nap. Bringing up the rear was Uncle Horace, with something on a string—and the something was nothing less or more than Guttersnipe.

Mrs. Jorkins, with a woman's inconsistency, declared that he had led her straight to little Josephine.

Thus the fairy wand waved again for Guttersnipe. Undoubtedly the supernatural power that guards and guides all mongrel pups had planned the whole thing, to give him appreciative masters, a warm home, and a baby to raise.

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT—In compliance with what we believe to be the preference of the great majority of our readers, all fiction appearing in MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE will hereafter be printed complete in each number. Next month's issue will contain two exceptionally good novelettes and a fine collection of short stories.

Fathomless

THE ARCTIC VOYAGE OF THE BARK AURORA, AND THE SECRET
OF THE TREASURE UNDER THE NORTHERN LIGHTS

By Captain Dingle

Author of "Wide Waters," "The Age-Old Kingdom," etc.

XIX

THREE was no sled expedition the next morning. Captain Muras fumed and fretted on deck all the forenoon, sending for Toivo Ranta a dozen times on meaningless errands, simply to find an excuse to talk to the mysterious Finn.

Toivo's light blue eyes glittered, and so did his teeth. A dozen times he went to the grindstone, whetted the razor-keen tip of his knife, and returned to a place at the bark's rail from which he could view the snowy wastes all around.

Snow had fallen all night, but it had not frozen hard. It still fell sparsely, but there was a steely appearance in the sky which seemed to suggest that the snow might cease and the temperature fall suddenly. Of work there was no sign, and neither Muras nor Mr. Coles appeared to care. On the main hatch all the gear was collected for the sled party, and there was nothing to do until sledding should be possible. Muras stepped down to the ice many times to try the footing, but clambered aboard again, cursing heartily at the thigh-deep, clinging snow.

Of the crew, none was visible. The gallery was shut tight, and the doctor kept himself aloof. Chips shut himself in his little room, hoping desperately that the boatswain would stay outside. The forecastle reeked with the smoke of soft coal and tobacco, and with the odors of damp wool and kerosene. It hummed with the muttering of men who were fast falling under the menacing spell of ignorant belief, superstitious fear, and superficial religion.

Salvation Sam slept in a dark, dingy

bunk, weary after a night of prayer. As long as Sam was awake and noisy with his rough and ready but sincere exhortations, most of the men were quite willing to swing along with him. He had a trick of catching a man's courage in flight and nailing it with a rousing song. When Sam was not there, they fell to muttering over the sinister happenings of the voyage.

Then, following naturally, there was the Finn—the mysterious Finn with his fateful knife, his talk of treasure, and his coldly glittering eyes. Since returning from the futile sled party of the day before, little fiery specks were to be seen amid the glitter of those light blue eyes, and they actually frightened the other men. Even Tyke Colomb made but a half-hearted bluff at seeming indifference.

"He's only got one more notch to cut afore all hands can see what's what about that knife o' his!" Tyke asserted.

"Yus, an' 'ow about it if 'e goes cracked of a sudden? 'E ain't safe to be loose!" whined Limehouse. "One notch! Blimy, 'ow do we know when 'e's goin' ter slip a bit o' steel into—"

"You don't have to worry, Limehouse. A man has to be killed before Toivo puts a notch to that knife," jeered Tyke.

"I see 'is eyes! Fair burnin' they was, like red-ot ice!" whimpered Limehouse, frightened rendering him impervious to any personal sneers.

"I'm goin' with the party this time," said Eke Paral.

The men who had gone previously grinned uneasily. None of them wanted to go again.

"There'll be somethin' happen, anyhow," Eke added surlily. "I'd ruther be

there, and see, than stop here shiverin' in my boots, an' then perhaps git stuck in my bunk arter all!"

"Attaboy, Eke! Attaboy!" chuckled Tyke. "There's room for three more like you to haul that infernal sled."

"Ain't you goin', Tyke?"

"Who? Me? Watch me, m'lad!" Tyke returned cryptically.

Near noon Muras leaped to the ice again and found that the snow had hardened. The snow shone glassily, crystallized by a fast falling temperature. The skies were metallic in their clearness. Away to the northward the tantalizing twin headland still loomed. The sea between it and the bark was sheathed with silvery ice, which would be solid enough to bear men before night. The greater ice field to which the bark was moored extended, heavy and seemingly permanent, far past the headland to the furthermost horizon.

Two glossy black seals fished at a distant water hole. A white shadow tumbling against the ice near the seals grew into a sportive bear. There were two snow-white birds circling about the galley smokestack, regarding the wreathing smoke with comical eyes, and flapping their wings frantically when they chanced to pass through the warm zone.

Of all these things, Muras saw but one—the twin-peaked headland.

"Boson!" he bawled. "Boson! Rouse out the sled hands, and get a move on. The snow's done. We'll stay until we find them furs this time!"

"Yu will stay a long time!" muttered Toivo, as he turned to the forecastle and collided with Tyke Colomb.

He called through the forecastle door for the sled party, and turned away as if in a dream, not waiting to see whether men responded or not. Again he bumped against Tyke, who was watching him curiously—always with a clear space behind, in case of need. He went past Tyke unseeing, walked to the rail, and leaped to the ice, to take his place by the sled, still unseeing.

"Like a bloomin' sleepwalker!" Tyke told Eke Paral, as Eke led out the party. "If I was you, I'd ask the old man for a gun. Tell him you're scared o' bears. See, there's one out there now, Eke!"

Eke appeared pleased with himself, and the men with him were much less uneasy than their shipmates who were left behind.

"I don't need no gun," he said. "We don't want no guns, do we, mates?"

The three seamen shook their shaggy heads silently, and tumbled down to the sled. Tyke wondered whether he had overlooked something.

As soon as the sled passed from view, Mr. Coles, bethinking himself that he was now on shares, cast about for some way of evincing interest. It was difficult. Shares or no shares, there was not a thing to be done aboard the bark. The galley was well stocked with fuel; the sails were snugly furled; there was no water in the hold. Only the deep snow on the decks offered any excuse for turning the men to work, and Mr. Coles hesitated to set them to clear it off. He loved his ease too well to want to precipitate trouble, and he believed such an order would do that.

So he looked around importantly for a few moments, and then waddled off below, with a wheezing sigh, to reckon up his share before the saloon fire. Tyke Colomb watched him go from the concealment of the forward house.

In the opinion of Tyke, things were moving far too slowly. After his sled journey of the day before, he had pondered long and deeply over certain matters. Chief of these was Toivo's cool behavior toward the skipper. Even abreast of that double headland, where by all the signs Muras expected to uncover a fortune, the tall Finn displayed a frozen attitude of utter indifference to the captain. He had maintained, colorlessly, but with irritating persistence, that no furs remained when the Ptarmigan sank. Tyke had heard him say that. Muras had laughed at first, and then he had cursed the Finn, but Toivo had not altered his monotonous statement.

Muras undoubtedly believed, now, that the boatswain had designs upon the cache himself. That the Finn might be telling the truth Muras refused to believe. Tyke had expected to see the skipper attack Toivo once; but the attack had not developed, and for a very good reason—Toivo alone knew just where the Ptarmigan was nipped.

Peggy had not appeared yet. She had remained out of sight until the sled departed; but Tyke knew that she never let a day pass, whatever the weather might be, without spending some time in the open air, and he was expecting to see her now that Muras was gone.

Tyke was shrewd, in his rascally way. He knew that the crew of the Aurora had reached a point where a word either way might precipitate some sort of turmoil. If nothing definite regarding the bark's errand transpired soon, Salvation Sam might turn all hands crazy with his hell fire and brimstone religion, or Toivo might scare them all into mutiny.

Already there was a restless atmosphere forward. That morning, at breakfast, Sam had stopped a promising fight between Limehouse and an old graybeard who, in the middle of a long and dismal grace, had called the missioner a "belly-achin' bag o' wind." Limehouse picked his man well; but even the old graybeard, who was always excused from going aloft because of imminent senility, declined to be shouted down by Limehouse. The fight was going to be a good one, through the sheer uselessness of both combatants; but Sam stopped it. However, when two poor creatures like these wanted to murder each other, men with hotter blood and harder hearts might easily be started.

Tyke wanted to know something, and who better than Peg Bolter to tell him? She knew everything there was to know.

Presently, when she appeared, bareheaded to the cold, swinging a woolen tam-o'-shanter, red-cheeked and bright-eyed, Tyke ran up to the poop without any subterfuge. She gazed long down the sled trail, and turned with a queer little laugh to greet the crooked-legged sailor.

"Hullo, Tyke!" she said.

She was not in any of her usual moods. She was not saucy, nor challenging, nor cajoling, nor did she appear to be on the defensive. As she uttered the simple greeting, laughing the while, there was something of uncertainty, of rising perplexity, in her air.

Tyke seized her arm and pushed her into the deckhouse companionway. Peggy did not resist, nor did she salute him with characteristic tongue.

"What do you want, Tyke?" she asked quietly.

Tyke stared at her.

"You sick?" he returned.

"No. Why?"

"Kind o' quiet, ain't you? That's queer to me!" Tyke suddenly burst into a fervid string of profanity, while the girl gazed at him curiously. "The blasted ship's bewitched!" he growled, when he recovered

his breath again. "There's Eke gone out with three new men, arter I refused to go with the sled again. Eke ain't no blood drinker, neither. There's coves fightin' each other for'ard as never hit a punch in their lives before. There's Salvation Sam prayin' on his knees in a corner, callin' us shockin' names to Gawd. And here's you, lookin' as if you'd eat a bad tin o' salmon or something. What's the Finn been sayin' to you? I see you talkin' to him through the port."

"Toivo wouldn't say anything to hurt me, Tyke. Besides, I ain't hurt. I'm happy," said Peggy, strangely quiet.

"Happy? Huh!" grunted Tyke. He looked suspicious; but a girl's happiness or otherwise was not of vital importance to him just then. "Well, what did the Finn have to say to you, anyhow?" he wanted to know.

Peggy's eyes wandered dreamily. He shook her arm.

"Listen, Peggy — you know something. Let us in on it. What's the real truth about the stuff we're arter? Don't forget you promised to stand in with me!"

"Tyke, there's nothing left to know. It's all wrong," she replied. "Toivo always said there wasn't any furs. He says so now. He don't care a tinker's curse for Muras or his affairs. That knife is his god. He—"

"Then why don't Muras take his knife away and clap him in irons, or croak him?"

"Don't ask me, Tyke," Peggy answered wearily. "Muras won't believe Toivo. He's scared to cross the Finn, because—well, listen."

Peggy spoke rapidly, and in low tones. Tyke's rugged features gradually assumed a frown, which became a scowl, and his eyes burned. When the girl ceased, he shook his head in bewilderment.

"What about us, then?" he demanded.

"I don't know or care, Tyke. I only want to see this ship turn homeward. It's all wrong, Tyke—all wrong!"

Peggy ran below, and Tyke went forward. Twice he halted in the snow-filled decks, to turn and glare malevolently aft, muttering no good wishes to the girl if, as he suspected, she was playing a new and clever game. Then he entered the forecastle, cursing bitterly because Salvation Sam still prayed on his knees in the darkest corner, filling the fetid air with awful words.

One by one the men who had been with him on the first sled trip gathered around Tyke, and their muttered conversation showed the trend of their thoughts.

"The wench swears she believes it!" muttered Tyke.

"What? There ain't never been no furs?"

"That's what she says. She says Toivo always swore there wasn't any, but Muras wouldn't believe it."

"Hell! That ain't reasonable, Tyke! What did Muras fit out this blessed bark for? What is he payin' double wages for? Tell us that, old hoss!"

"Don't bullyrag me!" growled Tyke. "It ain't my yarn. She just told me. Seems that the yarn got round, arter the Ptarmigan was lost, that Toivo was back with some hot talk about a fortune layin' up there. He was her ice pilot. He was the only man as did come back. Muras got the yarn, put two and two together, and guessed as Toivo knew where them furs was. Toivo never said so; but he said there was a fortune, and he wanted to get back up here. That made Muras sure, so he raised the cash and fitted out this bark; but the wench says, and believes it, too, that Toivo only agreed to show Muras where the Ptarmigan sunk. The Finn is arter his own lay—the treasure he hopes to find with that knife."

"And he's crazy!"

"Hell! He ain't the only one," muttered Tyke, cocking an ear, as Salvation Sam's fervor rose to a climax. "Maybe the Finn ain't so loony, at that. I wish he'd hurry up and stick that knife o' his into somebody, so's we could see who's got the proper dope!"

"Maybe he'll stick it into Eke," came a hopeful rejoinder.

Salvation Sam rose from his knees and strode with wild eyes into the circle about the stove. Men drew back, scowling up at him. His prayers had annoyed even the warmest of his converts. Even Limehouse wavered in his allegiance, since he had been prevented from making a warlike showing against the only man he had a chance to whip; but then Limehouse was always a waverer. He was just as likely to waver back.

"Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!" bellowed Sam, standing with uplifted hand in the midst of the men, and fixing them with blazing eyes. "Come

unto me, all ye who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest! Men, you've got two chances! The devil's ragin' around, ready to fork you down to the pit. From end to end of this evil ship he has laid a trail of fire and brimstone, and you one and all are following it! Repent, for the—"

"E can go to 'ell, can't 'e, Tyke?" whined Limestone, creeping from under the spell of Sam's fiery gaze and crowding into Tyke's little circle.

"Aye, and you go along with him, you rat!" growled Tyke, hurling the waverer back to Sam.

Sam's thundering sentences filled the smoky forecastle and shook the lantern glass. The man was exalted to frenzy. A frightened sailor crept to his bunk, but Sam hauled him out and made him stay to listen. Limehouse whimpered, and crouched with awe-struck gaze uplifted to the missioner's pale and haggard face.

Suddenly Sam's sermon ceased. He raised his voice again in singing:

"We're marching to Zion,
Beautiful, beautiful Zion!
We're marching upward to Zion,
The beautiful city of God!"

There were rhythm and enticement in that song. One by one gruff voices took it up. Limehouse added his shrill pipe to the chorus, and derived courage therefrom. Soon all hands except Tyke's gang were swaying to it. Old Chips poked in his head, and remained.

Then, one by one, Tyke's cronies deserted him for the singing, and Tyke was alone, sitting on his bunk, sneering at the proceedings, but alone for all that.

XX

No sled returned to the ship that night. Snow began to fall again with the going down of the early sun, and a breeze drifted it against the bark's weather side until it sloped sheer from the ice to the bulwark rail.

Mr. Coles ventured outside and shivered for ten minutes while he strove to penetrate the fleecy veil for sight of the returning party. Then he decided in favor of his snug berth and the comforting grog that he had brewing on the stove. He saw that lanterns were hung in the rigging, and that a watch of sorts was kept in the shelter of the galley. Then he went below and drank

himself into a state of warm and amorous beatitude while waiting for supper.

As Lute passed to and from the galley with the dishes, little swirls of snow eddied into the companionway with him. Lute's beaten face was fast mending under the treatment that Peggy insisted upon giving it, but there was still only one bright eye visible through the strips of plaster. That solitary eye bothered Mr. Coles. To his half drunken perception it seemed to be fastened on him in a stare of reproof.

"Stooard," wheezed the mate, at length, "you done layin' the table, haven't you?"

"All done, sir. Supper's ready," replied Lute cheerfully.

He had been cheerful all day. He had even tried whistling, but that proved too much for his bandages. His cheerfulness cropped out in his bright eye and his snappy movements. He turned his single available optic upon the mate.

"Well, then," Mr. Coles puffed through the steam of his grog, "go and call that wench, tell her supper's set, and then you clear to hell out o' my sight. I don't like that eye o' yours, see?"

"All right, sir," Lute replied civilly. "If you want me, I'm only in the pantry."

Peggy appeared slowly, as if uncertain whether she wanted supper or not. She had a fine red color in her cheeks, and her eyes held dancing fires, but she kept her lashes drooping in an unaccustomed fashion. Lute turned her swing chair for her. His face, where exposed, was also high colored.

Mr. Coles only saw the girl. He saw that she was good to look at. Her new shyness, he assumed, was maidishly and natural. He bent a rolling eye upon her as she came to the table, and few girls of Peggy's sort could long resist the masculine fascinations of such a man as he, when he chose to lay himself out to be fascinating.

"Let me give you some hash, Peggy," he said, reaching for her plate.

She passed it to him, and looked up. Under the burning glare of his piggy little eyes she swiftly lowered her lashes, hotly resentful. He filled her plate, as she held it, and then let his fingers wander along her wrist.

"Peggy, my lass, let's have a snug little party—just you and me, hey? Muras 'll never know, and what he don't know won't hurt him, hey? Why should he hog all a pretty girl's time, hey?"

He drew her hand toward him, apparently forgetful of the plate he had filled. His eyes were redly lustful, and his breath puffed in short gasps through his thick lips. Peggy's plate was almost beyond her control, so stretched was her arm; but she was no man's fool, as men usually discovered. She quickly transferred the laden plate to her free hand, and let him draw the other to him. Then, with a gesture so rapid that his eyes were full of hash before the plate hit him, she dashed her supper into his red face and darted back from the table.

"Take it, if you want it, but don't pull my arm out!" she snapped, and burst into a jeering laugh.

Mr. Coles dug at his eyes with his fingers, like a bear pawing at bees. His red face was plastered with hash, his hair was full of it, and a trickle of blood from a gash cut by the plate in his fat cheek made a messy poultice of his beauty. Until Peggy laughed, he did not seem furious so much as pained; but her laugh turned him into a fat, wheezing avenger. He staggered around the table after her, groping for her, hauling the cloth and gear from the table with a crash.

"I'll make you laugh proper, you little sailortown hussy!" he gurgled.

She backed along the narrow way between the table and the bulkhead, trying to reach her cabin; but at his threat she halted, and turned white with passionate anger. He shuffled toward her, his fat fingers crooked, a devilish grin on his lips.

"Muras could leave out o' the log all about Soler's murder. You paid him to, I guess; but he'll have to log it if I demand it; and so I will, unless you pay me the same way, you hussy! Oh, well, come here, deary! I don't want to see you get hurt."

"You go shut yourself up in your own room, or I'll send you after Soler!" said Peggy.

She whipped up the bread knife from the floor, and flicked his outstretched fingers with the tip of it.

Lute's pantry door opened. There had been noise enough to assure him that it was no sailorly flirtation that was going on. Coles halted in blank panic. The knife had drawn blood from his fingers, and the girl was a veritable white-lipped fury. Slowly he began to back.

The young steward did not step out into the saloon, for he caught Peggy's stern eye,

and he knew enough to take warning; but when Mr. Coles fell backward into his little cabin, and kicked the door shut with a hearty curse, Lute emerged, and gently took the knife from the girl's trembling hands. Had the need arisen, he would have acted vigorously; but he read a command in the stern glance that she gave him, and her command was his law.

"Don't let anybody tease you into using a knife again, Peggy," he said gently. "Let me bring you some coffee to your berth. Don't come out again to-night, and I'll take care that nobody bothers you."

The girl sobbed once—a dry, choking sob that hurt Lute. Then she swore at him like a barge woman, simply to avoid having that sob run into more, and darted through her own doorway.

Silently Lute went to work clearing up the scattered supper gear, and eradicating the mess of scrambled edibles from the red carpet runner. He washed the dishes, built up the saloon fire, trimmed the lamp, and drew the red plush curtains over the port glasses.

Lute was queerly agitated. He performed the commonplace things of everyday routine with methodical precision, going over some things as if they had suddenly become of vital importance; and for nearly an hour he found fresh things to do which did not need to be done.

At length he seemed to have finished. Fresh coffee bubbled in the pantry, and it had bubbled for some time. After pouring out a cupful, and sweetening it with condensed milk, he still paused to button up his jacket and retie a shoe before going to Peggy's door with the hot drink.

He tapped softly. Receiving no response, he turned the handle and went in. The tiny room was dim, and the small light only cast shadows. Lute listened. All was quiet. He could even hear the subtle murmur of the sea before the ice level, rippling against the bark's bottom planking. He listened for Peggy's breathing.

"Peggy!" he called, very softly.

Still there was no answer, but he caught a faint, fluttery sigh. Bearing the steaming coffee, he stepped to the bunk.

"It's Lute, Peggy. Here's your coffee," he whispered.

In an instant her hands gripped his wrist fiercely, so that he dropped the cup. Then she repressed a little cry, and relaxed.

"Gawd!" she breathed. "I must be all

shot to pieces, Lute, to act like this! I'm all in, boy. Was I sleepin'? How long you been here?"

"Just come. Now I got to get you some more coffee. Wait a minute!"

"Never mind the coffee. Did—did—say, you didn't let that fat swine see you come here, did you?" Her voice rose sharp and hard. "I've had enough of men takin' me for a—"

Lute leaned toward her awkwardly, but not shyly. Before she had completed her sentence he swept her into his long, sinewy arms, and, in defiance of all her fierce resistance, he drew her head against his breast and kissed her hair, inexpertly, but with intense fervor.

"Peggy!" he crooned, and began to talk to her as he would talk to a hurt child, gentling her, soothing her, gradually changing until his theme was not so much the girl as both of them.

For a while she lay there against his chest, breathing fast, her slender shoulders heaving.

"Peggy, men will always talk about a girl when they think they can. Don't you see? You're here, one girl in a crowd of men—not such good men, either, Peggy. You need a man—one man—to protect your name. You need a man with the right to do it. Muras is botherin' you—I know he is, and he ain't for protectin' you, neither. No more is Mr. Coles. Them fellers only has one way of treatin' a woman—you know that. The men for'ard, too—"

"You're crazy!" she suddenly shot at him, twisting in his arms, but without avail. "You dare to tell me that the men talk—"

"They do—you know they do. They talk, and you can't stop 'em, because they think you're a waterside girl who—"

Peggy broke loose from his clasp. Sitting up in her bed, she fixed her blazing eyes upon him, and her small body quivered with fury; but Lute had set out to say his piece, and say it he would, in the face of all odds, or of Peggy herself.

He deliberately put her hands aside, and gathered her again into his arms. She subsided through sheer amazement at his strength.

"Peggy, they do, and I can't bear to hear it. I love you so it hurts! I loved you the first time I seen you. I'm goin' to take you home to my folks, and—"

"Listen to me, Lute!" Peggy broke in, strangely quiet. "You're a good kid—I always said so; but you're only a kid. What do you know of the sort of world I belong to, or the sort of men I've known? You say you love me. Lute, you ought to have a medal! You're the best kid I ever knew; but nix, boy, nix! You haven't got me right. I may be a waterside girl. I may be everything they say, and maybe more; but one thing I ain't—I ain't no beggar for love. Your love! You're offering me something clean and fine, but for what?"

"My God, you don't think I'm like them others, do you?" gasped Lute. "For what? Peggy!"

"All the same, for what? You say you love me, and offer to protect me from a bunch of toughs—out of pity—pity! Ain't it true? To hell with your pity!"

For a swift instant Peg Bolter's eyes flamed with a woman's hunger for the greatest thing in life—a clean man's love. It flamed there, for all her outburst of words, and Lute caught it before it died.

"It ain't pity, and you know it ain't," he said. "Why should I pity you, Peggy? Love ain't pity. You don't pity me, do you? No, you don't, but you love me! Keep quiet—I mean it. Do you think I haven't seen it? Didn't you kill Soler to save me? Ain't Muras pesterin' the life out o' you because o' that? Peggy, you got to believe me. I'm goin' to take care o' you from now on, and Muras and all hands can't hurt you, if you only say the word!"

"You got a hell of a big opinion of yourself, big boy," Peggy laughed harshly; but she kept her eyes from his. "I killed Soler on my own account. I can repeat the trick on anybody else who pulls raw stuff on me. You saw how I stopped Coles, didn't you?"

She bowed her head lower, and her shoulders shook, while the harshness passed out of her voice and a softer, trembly note crept in.

"Lute, I like you too much to love you like you say. That's true! You told me all about that Western home o' yours—your mother, and your sister. I believe you meant it when you said you'd like to take me home to them, Lute; but you're all wrong. They'd turn up their snoots at your waterside—"

"Peggy, hush! You shan't say that!"

If my mother or my sisters said anything to make out you wasn't good, I'd—I'd never go home again, Peggy! You got to believe me. You do love me! Look at me! Look up! There! Peggy, you can't make your eyes tell lies!"

For a breathless moment she relaxed in his arms, and her eyes closed. The youth kissed her lips, fiercely, amateurishly, hungrily; but even in the swiftly passing swoon of reciprocal passion Peggy knew that his kisses were kisses of pure love. She shuddered, and her eyes fluttered open. Strongly she released herself from his arms, and stepped to the floor.

"Go now, Lute!" she whispered. "Get out! Don't ever do that again! Shut up, I tell you!" Fiercely she whispered, and now her flushed face was hard, her eyes glittered. "It's no use, Lute. You don't know what you're doing. Your folks—"

"Leave my folks to me!" retorted Lute decidedly. "It's no use—you're right about that—it's no use you fightin' me, Peggy! You're my girl, and I'm your man. If you don't believe me yet, just watch me if anybody speaks a wrong word to you, or about you. You might as well get wise to me. I ain't never loved a girl before. You watch me!"

Peggy pushed him toward the door. It was only two steps. She shook her head, but her eyes would not meet his.

"It'll seem different in the morning, Lute," she said. "Forget all about this. When Muras gets back, he'll be savage if he don't get some dope about them furs; and he won't. Toivo sticks to it there ain't any furs. If he sees us two moonin' around the ship like a pair of lovesick calves, he'll tear you apart, Lute! Don't I know him?"

"If he comes back like that, all the more reason why I have to take care o' you," retorted Lute, with emphasis. "I will, too. I ain't afraid o' Muras."

"Soler pretty near busted you to bits, and Ben Muras could eat Soler," Peggy reminded him, with the faintest hint of banter.

"That was because he was my officer, Peggy. I ain't no mutineer; but it ain't no mutiny to defend my sweetheart. You ain't got any more excuses, have you?"

"I got one—I'm tired to death, Lute. You run along to bed. If you don't wake up feelin' like a damned fool over what you've been sayin', you let me know. Perhaps I'll—no, you don't! Go to bed!"

Lute had stooped toward her eagerly. She eluded him, and shut her door in his face with a shaky little laugh.

Lute listened for a moment outside. Then he went off to his bunk, to dream of wildly pleasant things which seemed mostly composed of a farm, and flowers, and children, and Peggy; but chiefly Peggy, since Peggy was the mainspring of all.

XXI

MR. COLES was late in leaving his cabin the next morning. The bark was deeply covered with soft snow. In the air there was a warm breath that hinted at a thaw, and the new ice was broken in places.

There was no sign of the sled party, but Mr. Coles gave little thought to that. After one cursory glance around the white wastes, and a curt order to the carpenter to keep a good lookout, the mate returned to his cabin and nursed a grog bottle closely. He drank coffee by way of a breakfast, and cursed Lute Slade through a crack in the door.

Peggy had a similar breakfast, and baffled Lute with a new mood of queer dignity for which he could find no effective counter.

There was life in the galley, however. The devil seemed to have entered into the crew. Tyke Colomb and Al Raupo fought over precedence at the galley door. While the fight raged, Limehouse sneaked past and secured the mess kid of burgoo for his watch. One of Tyke's watch mates crowned the little man with the coffeepot.

The doctor fled to Chips, his crony.

"Murder's bein' done—that's what it is!" he gasped.

"Go tell Salvation Sam, then," grumbled Chips.

The carpenter was midway through his own breakfast, and was enjoying it. Oatmeal burgoo with molasses was soothing to his sparsely toothed gums.

"Hell, he's prayin' again!" cried the doctor. "What good is a blessed prayin' parson, when murder's doin'?"

"Ye're a noosance," muttered Chips; but he got up and took out an adz from his tool chest—a fearsome weapon. "Come on, useless!" he said. "Dry nussin' ship's cooks is what I shipped for, of course!"

The galley was filled with fighting sailors. One after another the two watches had gone to the galley to see the sport, and one by one they joined in. It was the culmination of weeks of unrest forward. Into

the mêlée went false religious fervor, superstitious fear, personal rancor, and sheer hysteria.

Only one man there struck blows from any other impulse than those. The ancient graybeard who had dared to challenge Limehouse on a previous occasion, hungry for his porridge, approached the fringe of the milling mob with newly awakened interest in his weak old eyes. Many a man had affronted him, calling him "useless," "old soldier," "Noah"—names of contempt, which he had accepted meekly, perforce. Now he saw these men too busy to notice him. He picked up a rolling half brick that had been kicked loose, and played a shrewd game of jack-of-both-sides on the heads that chanced to back close enough to him.

Then Chips charged into the battle with his murderous adz, and the galley was cleared in two minutes. Some battles went on in the snow on deck, but the carpenter was not concerned with those. He had helped the doctor to clear out the galley, so that cooking might go on, and that was enough. He went back to his porridge.

"Bloomin' shame! What do he want to spile a good scrap for?" mumbled the graybeard, reluctantly quitting his sport; but he slipped the half brick into his pocket as he entered the forecastle.

Salvation Sam had finished his prayers. He sat on a sea chest, glooming darkly, and waiting for breakfast. He glowered up at the scuffling men, most of them bleeding in some part of their features. The light of frenzy shone in his eyes, and he seemed to be boiling over with some great and explosive idea.

Limehouse came to him, whimpering as usual, and showing a broken head clearly marked with the shape of a coffeepot rim.

"A lot o' eathen, they are!" cried Limehouse. "Blimy, Sam, a bloke ain't safe no more! Dotted me on the callybash with a bloomin' cawfeepot, an' I wasn't doin' nuf-fink—s'help me Gawd, I wasn't! Carn't yer fix up me 'ead, Sam?"

Sam had been about to hurl reproof upon the quarreling sailors. He paused long enough to wrap a rag around the whining little ruffian's skull. The men began to settle to their breakfast, sitting on sea chests and bunk boards, holding plates and pannikins, lacking a table. There was a hot word, then there came a hotter retort, and in an instant the forecastle was packed

with snarling, kicking, hammering men, while scalding coffee and oatmeal porridge flew broadcast.

Sam roared angrily, bursting into the battle. Two men punched him on the nose, and he staggered back into a bunk, the lee board catching him behind the knees and folding him up; but Sam was of the stuff that bred crusaders long ago. In a moment he was up again and into the fray, his gaunt shoulders swaying, his long arms flailing. He roared anathema upon the fighters, striking hard, hauling desperately, tripping a man here, tugging hair there, until the gang burst into sections before his sheer berserk rage.

Two men who had got well set in a well matched up-and-downer took their argument out into the snow. In three minutes all hands followed, and a dozen separate combats raged outside, where only one big one had been afoot inside.

Sam could not handle the sailors. He stood on the hatch, bellowing threats, entreaties, and promises—all to no end.

"Sing a hymn to 'em!" grinned Chips sarcastically.

"Yus, Sam, let's sing 'em a 'ymn!" whined Limehouse, terrified at the extent of the battle that had grown out of nothing in five minutes.

"I'm goin' to fetch the mate!" cried the doctor, warily avoiding the fight, but practicing preparedness with his tormentors.

The cook plowed aft. The decks were trampled into a mess of dirty snow, plentifully sprinkled with red drops from a dozen tapped noses. Tyke Colomb had got Raupo down, and was industriously scraping the snow away from a ringbolt, in order that he might hammer his antagonist's face upon it. Men who had been pals all the voyage fought like fiends. The fiercest of all the combatants were the loudest singers of Sam's flock.

Limehouse cowered beside Sam, begging him to sing a hymn to them. The old gray-beard circled around, licking his withered lips, and seeking to drag Limehouse into the fracas in some way that would give him a chance to get in the first good wallop with his brick before Limehouse hit back.

The doctor reappeared, followed by the mate in surly mood. Mr. Coles carried a shotgun. His puffy face and bloodshot eyes gave the impression of impatience to shoot and get back to his snuggery.

"Quit that, you rascals! Cut it out!"

he yelled shrilly. He might as well have been yelling at a pack of icebergs. "D'yuh hear? I'll shoot if you don't stop!"

Nobody took any notice, and the battle raged on. Salvation Sam was trying to pry Tyke loose from Raupo, and Tyke was cursing the missioner soulfully. Then Mr. Coles's gun went off. A shower of small shot, at no more than twenty yards, slashed through the men.

The report died away and left a deathly, ominous stillness. For a moment the silence lasted. Then the men set up a roar, deep, savage, hurt, and moved in a single mass upon the mate.

"Stop! Don't dare come here!" he screamed, in sudden panic.

The second barrel of his gun exploded, and two men stumbled to their knees, cursing, shaking bleeding heads, and spraying the snow with fresher red. The doctor brandished his adz once, yelling defiance, and then he ran into the cabins. Mr. Coles raised his clubbed gun, backing away on trembling feet.

In the companionway Lute Slade appeared, wondering at the gunshots. At a main deck porthole Peggy's scared face was framed, her eyes big and round, her quickened breath clouding the port glass.

The raging men were at the ladder. The mate dropped his gun and turned to run, colliding with Lute in the doorway. It was the chance that the men sought, and they started to rush.

At that moment there came a shout from the ice. Four misty shapes appeared through the snow, and tumbled aboard over the rail, Muras stalking ahead into the riot with cold fury in his face.

The three men with him stared almost curiously at the mob of sailors, and then stumbled along forward, as if they had no interest in it. They seemed to be utterly exhausted and beaten.

Muras strode into the crowd from behind, uttering never a word of inquiry or threat, but flinging men here and there like skittles, until he reached the poop. Then he glanced once, contemptuously, at Coles, kicked aside the fallen shotgun, and swung upon the sailors.

"Get for'ard!" he barked. "Away with you! Want to fight, hey? Who's first?"

Tyke crowded to the front.

"He shot us! Look at them men!" snarled Tyke.

Muras slowly pulled his pistol.

"Get for'ard! If I shoot, you won't talk back! You going?"

Muras was following his code. He would investigate the trouble, but in his own way and in his own good time. Meanwhile he would not be dared by a gang of mutinous seamen.

His face warned them. The men backed down slowly, and drew out of the danger zone, scowling, snarling, but forced to obedience by the captain's bold front. When the poop was cleared, Muras turned upon Coles, demanding an explanation.

"They went crazy and rushed me!" wheezed the mate. "What with the parson and that mad Finn, the damned ship's all crazy!"

Muras laughed evilly. He tottered as he stood, as if desperately weary. His clothes were soaked with perspiration and melted snow. His breathing was that of a spent runner, and his heavy shoulders swayed.

"Perhaps you're right, mister," he said. "It wouldn't be any wonder. Anyhow, I'm crazy. I'm dangerous crazy, mister, so don't get me sore. I don't know what you've been up to with the crew, but I'll find out. Just now, though, there's other business. That damned Finn is gone."

"Dead?" gasped Coles. "Didn't he show you where to find—"

"Dead be damned! He went while we cooked supper, and the snow covered his tracks. We near founded getting back. You stay on deck while I snatch an hour's snooze. Call me in an hour—or before, if he comes back."

"Huh! He won't come back!"

"Then all hands 'll get out and hunt him," growled Muras, stumbling off below.

Snow over the portholes made the saloon dim and objects indistinct. For a moment the captain stood at the foot of the stairs, rubbing his eyes, which were still full of the snow glare. Something warned him of some presence near, and he stooped to peer around.

A transom ran across the stern, abaft the saloon table, and four small round windows lighted it. Upon it sat Peggy, her head upraised to Lute Slade, who stood over her. Her hands grasped one of his, while with the other he caressed her hair. Lute's back was toward the companionway; it was Peggy's sharp eyes that saw Muras, and she sprang to her feet with a little cry, pushing Lute away.

There was an instant of pregnant hush. Then Muras uttered a sound, half curse, half sneer, and walked toward the girl.

"Get out o' this!" he snarled at Lute, still peering painfully in the gloom.

Lute moved aside, but not very far.

"Yes, sir," he said civilly.

Muras stumbled against the chair at the end of the table. His eyes would not lead him right. His feet would not carry him right. His sled party had refused to drag the sled, and it had been left behind. He had walked, as they had, every yard of that terrific tramp through softening snow back to the ship. His old wound hurt him. The blood was pounding at his heart and his temples; the dim warmth of the saloon bewildered him; but the steward had dared to philander with his girl. He stumbled again, and his groping hands seized Peggy's dress.

"What are ye doing here?" he rasped. "You been lettin' that damned farmer pet you? If you have—"

"Go take a sleep! You're all woozy!" Peggy answered sharply.

She was furious at having been detected in such a situation with Lute. With anybody else—or with Lute, until yesterday—she would just have laughed at Muras, had he caught her; but she did not feel like laughing now. Had the light been stronger, Muras might have been amazed to see a flood of high color surge across her face. He did not see that, but he heard her contemptuous retort, and he gripped her savagely. She dug at his hands with her finger nails, and he cursed her. Then Lute stepped in and tore the captain's grip from her with an effortless strength which might have impressed Muras at another time.

"Hands off, Cap'n Muras! Peggy's my girl," said Lute.

Muras backed away and sank to the transom settee in gasping astonishment. His eyes goggled and his teeth ground together harshly. His strong hands gripped and crushed the settee cushions, but he was incapable of speech. He saw Lute gently urge the girl toward her cabin. He watched the door open and shut, and he watched Lute as the young Westerner turned and came briskly toward him again.

"Can I get anything for you, sir?" Lute wanted to know.

Lute was the conscientious steward again. Muras wanted to stand up, to take the young fellow in his two hands, to break

him in pieces; but, queerly, the skipper's legs refused to support him, and his head throbbed so that he had no control over it as it drooped wearily. He staggered to his feet, laughing unsteadily, accepting the support of the strong young steward.

"You can get me to bed, and then get to hell!" he laughed, and plunged forward through his stateroom door.

XXII

EKE PARAL and his three sled mates lay in their bunks in agony, slowly recovering from the terrific journey they had just survived. Tyke Colomb helped Salvation Sam to minister to them, and his ugly face wore a grin of sinister satisfaction.

Tyke was well pleased on several counts, but chiefly because, while helping Sam, he could help himself to the rum that was one of the restoratives used.

All the forecastle crowd lounged about, silently looking on. Their own differences had been wiped out by the mate's shotgun. They had a common grievance now, and as soon as Salvation Sam finished doctoring his patients they would air it thoroughly.

Some of the men were badly shot up. Chips had been busy for an hour picking shot out of blue flesh with a sharpened and polished pair of compasses. The doctor made bandages with greasy oakum, and unhurt men lent a hand; but the murky atmosphere of the forecastle was heavy with portent.

Tyke Colomb had escaped all the affrays with no more injury than Raupo had inflicted on him with his hands in their particular fight. Now he and his former enemy were friends again, for Raupo had gathered in a dozen pellets in various portions of his exposed anatomy, and was vowing dark and bitter vengeance upon Coles, for the shooting, and upon Muras, for butting in. That was the sort of man for Tyke!

Salvation Sam finished with Eke and moved along to the next man. Tyke stood over Eke, grinning down at him, and taking a long gulp of the sick man's rum before handing it over.

Eke's eye was fishy and sad. There was little bravado or even hope in that eye. When he took the lead in volunteering for the new sled party, he had stepped high and lightly through the snow, imbued with some high impulse.

Tyke had quit after one trip. He knew.

"Thought you was goin' to bring in a haul, didn't you?" Tyke jeered.

Eke's eyelids fluttered, and he reached up for the rum.

"Tyke, d'ye think that Finn's human?" he asked hoarsely.

"D'ye think he ain't?" countered Tyke. "What made you so hot to go along with the sled? Some hurry you was in! Some hurry you come back in, too!"

"We ain't in no hurry no more, Tyke. We stays here. Here's where things is goin' to happen pretty soon. Listen, Tyke!"

Eke painfully wrenched his head aside and peered around the forecastle for possible eavesdroppers.

"Let 'em hear!" shouted Tyke. "All hands is ready to tramp aft right now. This ain't no sort o' ship for honest men—gettin' shot, and froze, and such. Talk, Eke! Maybe you ain't got nothin' to say, at that?"

"Maybe I ain't," muttered Eke, swallowing down the last of his rum. "Anyway, we went out with the sled, because I figgered it might be as well to be right there when the Finn cut the last notch in that knife. I ain't no clever bloke, Tyke, but I know one thing—if this bark ain't up here on some wild-goose chase, there's goin' to be a show-down between the Finn and Muras pretty soon; and me and my mates wasn't goin' to be far away when that ninth notch was cut. We figgered, too, as we'd be safer along o' Muras than anywhere else. Muras knows something!"

"He don't know beans about the Finn. Nobody knows, unless it's that wench aft," growled Tyke.

"Maybe, Tyke. Anyway, we camps last night, puts up the shelter, and cooks grub. Snowin' like hell, too. When we looks around—right under the shadder o' that twin headland we was—the Finn's gone—clean gone, Tyke, and there ain't a scratch in the snow to show where he went! Is that human?"

"The snow covered his tracks," Tyke snapped. "You don't think he flew up in the air, do you?"

"There wasn't bearin' ice toward the headland, Tyke, but only to the nor'ard. Them roarin' ballyaluses was cracklin' something fierce just afore we looked for him. He went up with 'em, I say, if you ask me!"

"Well, Muras 'll bring him down. He's got to. Muras is all adrift if he don't.

There ain't no more furs cached up here than there is in my bunk, if you ask me."

Tyke's voice increased in power as he rambled on, and men ceased muttering to listen to him. Only the sonorous tones of Salvation Sam, praying over a poor devil who cried with the agony of his shot-lacerated face, broke in upon the hush.

"The Finn fooled Muras into fittin' out this bark so's he could have a passage up here to look arter that blessed treasure he's been yammerin' about," Tyke went on. "And what do we all get out of it? If Muras don't get his furs, how's he goin' to pay us them double wages? If you ask me, mates, we stand to get the tarry end o' the stick, and here we're gettin' all shot up, into the bargain. The Finn may be crazy, but he's crazy like a fox. If he's gone, he'll know something when he comes back!"

"He won't come back!" growled Raupo. "He will. He's got to. How's he goin' to get his loot back home, if he don't?"

"There ain't no loot! We're all a lot o' chumps. I vote we goes aft and calls Muras's hand!"

Salvation Sam rose to his feet. He had finished the last bandage. He had been praying loudly, but had missed little of the discussion all around him. Now he strode into the circle about the stove and put a hand on Raupo's arm.

"Brothers, you are heading the wrong course! There is evil in the ship, and there is plenty of reason why you should feel hurt and resentful; but it's mutiny that you're talking. Mutiny will get you nothing but stark tragedy. Haven't we had tragedy enough? Just now you are full of dark passions. Wait! Wait until Captain Muras appears after resting. I'll speak to him then. He'll turn homeward, surely. He must know there is nothing to be gained here. Toivo has gone, nobody knows where. Muras has made a mistake. Before you rashly go aft, to aggravate him into action which must surely do you nothing but harm, let us gather together here and ask the Great Captain to guide us!"

Sam's eyes glittered in the firelight like twin coals. His hair was long and wild, and he had grown pitifully thin and haggard. He was a lean, sinewy, fiery apostle preaching in a fearful human wilderness. Silence should have waited on his fervent words, but only the rumbling talk of sullen sailors greeted him. The men of the

Aurora had a grievance which was only to be settled in one way, and that way was not the way of prayer.

Still, Sam continued his discourse. He flung impassioned entreaty at them, and it rebounded, leaving no impression. Men still sore from wounds cursed at him without subterfuge, although a short time before they had been ready to fawn upon him for his tenderness. He said altogether too much about their sinful souls for their peace of mind.

Outside, the bark was like a ship of the dead. No life appeared on her snow-filled decks. There was scarcely a feather of smoke at the galley pipe, for the doctor and Chips sat inside with the stove going at full red blast, which left no smoke. The snow filled the skies like a gray blanket, but did not fall. There was still a suspicious mildness in the air, not represented in the actual standing of the thermometer so much as in the feeling that behind the frost there was thaw.

Nobody was keeping watch. There was no sign of life in the after part of the ship. Muras slept, the mate kept himself well under cover, and there was nothing, apparently, to bring the men outside.

Now and then a reverberating series of reports ran over the ice, making the Aurora tremble. Fresh ice, which had formed between the main ice field and the land, was broken and free about the bark. It had not yet hardened into a bearing surface. The bark's anchors out on the ice floe were buried deep in snow. Where the cables left the floe, to come inboard by hawse pipe or a fair-lead, they were grotesquely iced to the thickness of a barrel.

The bark herself seemed to have become a part of the frozen scene. There were moments, at long and irregular intervals, when she rolled ever so gently in the grip of some far traveling ocean swell that passed under leagues of ice and sported with her. Then the ice undulated, and the thickened mass close by her side, formed of broken cakes frozen over and over again, broke from her planking. As she slowly rolled her six hundred tons back upon it, she crunched it as a lioness crunches a bone.

Daylight though it was, there was no visibility beyond pistol shot of the ship. At twenty fathoms, even the snow appeared to vanish into the gray of the sky.

Salvation Sam emerged from the fore-

castle, bareheaded, his coat partly unbuttoned, his large, gaunt head sunk upon his chest. He did not move far. As if he had elected himself sentinel, he sat down in the snow on the fore hatch, and buried his face in his hands, his shoulders shaking with dry sobs.

The bark rolled deeper than she had hitherto. The ice crackled loudly. For a moment the sound was fearsome. It brought no sailors out, nor did it arouse Sam from his grief over his sinful flock and his failure as a spiritual leader.

The reverberations persisted longer than usual. There came a sharp crash, and a shuddering jerk at the bark's stem. Still nobody looked out. Such a thing as seamanly alertness had long since passed out of the Aurora.

Had Muras been in normal condition, he must have come up to see the reason for that crash. It was repeated, and with the jerk and crash there was a heavy metallic twang. The bark was shaken so heavily that snow and ice fell from her frozen sails and gear.

There was a little air out of the north-east, and a few flurries of snow sifted across the ice. Slowly the bark swung around, with her head free. That last crash had broken away the great cake of ice in which her bow anchor was buried, and now it slowly drifted with her as she turned to the drive of the gentle breeze. She swung by her stern, held by one anchor aft. Her bow chain hung down from the hawse pipe to the free ice cake. There was water around her, for she crushed the thin, fresh ice through sheer weight, and the light air urged her to the full scope of the stern cable.

Now and then sounds came from the forecastle, and each was more assertive than before. Tyke Colomb had taken charge of the rum that had been issued the day before to last for a week, demanding it from the steward as medicine for the injured men. Tyke's stewardship had regard to his own needs first of all, but the liquor was going around to some effect. Once the forecastle door opened, and a sailor stepped halfway out, only to be hauled back quickly. The sounds of rusty harmony arose from within.

Salvation Sam still sat in the snow, bowed down with grief, shaken with dry, racking sobs. At times he straightened up rigidly, raised his haggard face, and

stretched his arms to the skies with fists tightly clenched, as if to demand a sign from the Master whom he served, and who seemed deaf to his prayers; but always he collapsed again, to sob and brood.

There had been no sun that day, no bright spot in a grim and evil desolation. A few birds had attached themselves to the bark, relishing the scraps she offered; but all save one had flown. That one, a ragged old gull, one-eyed, pecked bare in places, veteran of countless fights, sat all ruffled up on top of the galley beside the stove-pipe, his one bright eye just visible among his disreputable plumage—a very crow of a bird, for all his white color.

The bark surged forward, raising her stern cable taut. When she halted and swayed back, the rope fell to the ice with a clanging thud.

Out of the companionway door stepped young Lute Slade, with a frown of worry on his healthy face, to look uncertainly along the deserted decks. He seemed glad at sight of Sam sitting there, though there was nothing in Sam's attitude to suggest gladness. Lute had something on his mind, and he was bound to get it off. He munched through the beaten snow of the main deck, with its plentiful patterning of red stains, and touched Sam on the shoulder.

"Sam, I want to speak to you about Peggy," he said.

Sam raised his head, and Lute was horrified to see a face which held all the agony of one crucified.

"Who cares to hear me speak?" demanded Sam fiercely. "They will not listen to me. What can you have to say to me, young man? Go away! I am a miserable failure!"

"But Peggy—"

"Peggy doesn't need me. Go to her!"

"Maybe she don't need you, parson, but she sent me to you, just the same," persisted Lute.

For a moment a softer light gleamed in Sam's pained eyes.

"She always came to me with her little troubles, ever since she was a child," he murmured.

"Sure, Sam! You know her better than anybody—that's what she says. I want her to promise to marry me when we get home. I want to take her home to my folks. I want to take care of her here, too. I'm going to do that, anyhow; but she says I have to come to you first. You know all

about her. I don't care what you know, but she told me to ask you if my sisters would turn up their noses at her if they knew—”

“Young man,” said Sam in a shaky voice, standing up and glaring at Lute, “did Christ turn up his nose at Mary Magdalene? Is this love that you say you have for Peggy, and yet you come to me—”

“That's what I say!” cried Lute eagerly. “She's the best girl in the world, Sam! You'll come and talk to her, won't you? I told her so. Muras started to bother her as soon as he got back. I'll tell Muras where he—say, Sam!” Lute gripped the missionary's arm tightly. “Couldn't you marry us? Then I'd be able to take care of her properly, wouldn't I?”

“My boy, you are strangely innocent,” replied Sam. “There is but one law up here, apparently, and that is evil. Muras is captain of the ship, and he would put you out of the way if you—”

“Let him try it! I'll kill him!” cried Lute fiercely.

“Oh, God! Violence, and yet more violence! Is there never an end to passion? Come along aft—I'll see Peggy. Perhaps Muras will hear me, too. He must! The ship seethes with black portent. I am afraid!”

They went aft. There was a resounding report astern of the ship, and the stern anchor wrenched its icy bed from the great floe. The cable whanged against the bark, and a shiver went through every timber. Then she began to drift. The faint air rose to a sharp blast, died, and rose again in a hard breeze.

Before Sam reached the poop at Lute's heels, Mr. Coles rushed up from below and stared around. Behind him Captain Muras appeared, anxious and bewildered, awakened suddenly from the profound sleep of utter weariness.

While they peered around, while the men tumbled from the forecastle and Chips and the doctor from the galley, a tall, uncouth figure rushed through the mushy ice of the floe, springing from broken cake to floating floe, until it reached the widening span of open water. Like a polar bear it plunged into the sea, beat with titanic energy across it, and climbed to the ice where the stern anchor lay. Then Toivo clambered up the hanging chain, fell aboard over the taffrail, and strode, all dripping and freezing, to where Muras stood.

“Get ta ship under way! We must sail nort!” he thundered.

XXIII

MURAS stared in amazement. The men stood still, thunderstruck.

“Nort! Sail nort!” cried Toivo.

He was apparently oblivious to all but the necessity to get the bark under way. He stood at the poop rail, glistening with water already turning to ice, bareheaded, barehanded, with blazing eyes. Men clustered about the ship's waist, looking up askance. Muras took a step forward, with evil intent in his face, but halted as Toivo suddenly faced him.

“Ay have found it!” he cried. “Last night Ay found it. Yu must sail fifty miles furder nort', ant Ay shall show yu. Make sail, Muras—make sail!”

The tall Finn began to range about the poop fretfully. One big, bony hand gripped the haft of his knife, as if frozen there. Men who had come near backed away. Sailors who had started to come aft, to confront Muras and demand justice upon Coles, paused and crowded farther away from the terrific figure of the boatswain.

“He's clean gone!” gasped Coles. “Ought to put him in irons!”

Muras laughed, but not easily, for he had seen the situation of his ship. The breeze was blowing stronger every minute, off the ice, and dead on to a lee shore. His two anchors were floating uselessly upon two rafts of ice, swashing after the drifting bark like two sperm whales alongside of an old spouter.

His first problem was to break the anchors loose, so that they might be lowered to the ground under keel; his second was to get sail on the bark, so that she might not drag bodily ashore while the ice was being broken. These things must be done at once, even though the Finn went stark mad. As for putting the boatswain under restraint, there was the matter of those furs to be settled yet.

Muras was not the man to make such a voyage and then give up because his pilot looked crazy. He believed that Toivo hoped to hog all the proceeds of the voyage himself; but he did not yet believe that there was no fortune at all to be found. He would demand a show-down as soon as the bark was safe. He scarcely liked the Finn's appearance, for just then Toivo looked altogether too susceptible to a sud-

den impulse to add the ninth notch to his knife; but Ben Muras was no weakling, whatever other faults were his.

"All right," he replied to Mr. Coles, with a grim chuckle. "You shall clap the darbies on him as soon as we get clear of this mess. Boson, take some men for'ard and clear that anchor and chain. We sail north!"

"Ay stay here ant pilot yu," returned Toivo, his teeth chattering with the icy chill that struck through his saturated clothes.

Muras shrugged.

"Very well! You get for'ard, Mr. Coles. Start some men to chopping the ice from the windlass and chain, and then make sail while they heave in."

"They'll murder me if I go among them!" wheezed Mr. Coles in terror. He had seen the men as they faced aft, and their eyes seemed to speak to him. "I'd rather take a chance along o' the Finn, cap'n!"

Muras laughed unpleasantly, and his strong teeth came together with a clash.

"Stay here and start work on the stern anchor, then," he snapped. "Knock the ice off the spanker, so you can set it. I'll send the parson aft to you. Maybe he can stiffen you up a bit with prayer!"

"That's all right, cap'n," wheezed Coles, unabashed. "Rather be stiffened up with prayer than sliced up with sheath knives!"

Muras went forward, taking men with him as he passed them. They growled, but obeyed him. None seemed overanxious to make one of the after gang while Toivo ranged like a bear across the poop. Not for a cut at Coles would they go up there, where a madman held control—a madman who gripped a knife lacking one notch to bestow upon him the supreme power of light and darkness, life and death.

True, Toivo did not seek out anybody, as if eager to cut that notch. His gaze was fixed upon the northern horizon, and his restlessness seemed to be due to the idleness of the bark; but he was not like a human being. Any other man, after a plunge into the icy sea, must have died of exposure in that wind.

Nobody but himself knew the terrific journey he must have accomplished to reach the bark. Muras and his men had been all but beaten in making their return. Toivo had done all that they had done, and more, to wind up with a mad, leaping race

from floe to floe, a plunge, a swim, and a killing climb up a perpendicular ice-sheathed chain; yet there he stood, impatient to pilot the Aurora northward.

Even the deepest doubts wavered at sight of him. Surely no man, mad or not, would persevere like that unless there was a real and worth-while goal in sight!

Salvation Sam and Lute went up to Mr. Coles, and started chopping the ice from the fair-lead of the stern cable. When the noise made a drum of the interior, Peggy appeared, seeking the cause, and looking frightened. She saw Toivo standing there, rapidly freezing into an ice statue, and her lips parted in awe, so fearful was his rapt expression.

As he turned in his ranging, he saw her, and the ice on his face cracked in a weird smile. He strode to her. Two steps brought him beside her. He laid a hand as cold as death upon her shrinking shoulder, and seemed unaware that she cringed from him.

"Ay shall find ta treasure of ta Aare Hauta to-morrow, Peggy! Ay could not follow ta lights farther last night. Ta ice is broken. Fifty miles nort', then Ay shall bring yu a gold ring, ant ta worlt shall be mine tu give yu. Yu have spoken goot words to me, Peggy!"

"Toivo, you ought to change into dry clothes," whispered Peggy, in deeper awe. "You'll die, and then what good 'll the world do you, hey?"

"Ay shall not die, Peggy. To-morrow Ay shall cut ta notch—"

"Oh, who are you going to kill?" the girl breathed, fascinated. "You don't mean it, Toivo? Who'll it be?"

"It does not matter," Toivo returned coldly, evenly. His eyes wandered north again, and he resumed his ranging. "Yu come to me to-morrow, Peggy. Yu shall be a queen!"

For several moments Peggy watched him as a babe watches a bright, dancing bubble. She could not have said what it was that she expected to see. It cost her a sharp physical wrench to tear herself away and run below to the warmth and security of the cabin. Only when she was huddled up in a chair before the fire did she realize that she had become chilled to the bones while standing there with Toivo.

Forward, Muras drove his men to exertions such as they had never put forth be-

fore. Slowly they got the cable in so that they might begin shattering the ice that floated the anchor and made it useless.

"See yonder lee shore?" he bellowed at them, if they slacked in their labors. "Once touch that, and say good-by to yer useless bodies, for the devil will sure get yer souls! Rouse that chain in! Round with her, bullies! What's up with the topsails there? Frozen halyards? Hell! Get some boiling water from the galley, and thaw 'out the sheaves! Look at the shore, you wooden men! Chop away those gaskets, if you can't cast 'em loose! I mean you on the main topsail yard! See that lee shore? Damnation, we're drifting broadside into it now! Ain't you got no souls to save? Where's the parson? Come, bullies, let's sail this ship!"

Cajoling, cursing, bullying, jollying, Muras led his sullen crew to herculean tasks. The icy cable crept inboard, with the big anchor hanging clear of the ice. The fore and main topsails went aloft—not with a chantey, not with a will, but they went up, nevertheless, and were trimmed to a beam wind, while the stern cable still dragged aft. A jib fluttered up the stay, the spanker was hauled out, and the men trooped aft at the skipper's heels to complete the job of boarding the after anchor.

By the time the frozen links lay heaped on the poop, the wind had hardened to a smart breeze, and the bark, close-hauled, was sailing slowly along the edge of the ice, almost touching it in her endeavor to get as far as she could to windward of that forbidding twin headland to the north.

Muras stood by the helm, watching the ice, and ever keeping an eye upon the Finn. The seaward ice was undulating for miles, breaking into cakes of all sizes, and filling the air with noise. The skipper was anxious. The headland stretched out ahead. If the bark held her course as she was going, she might weather it safely; but the ice was creeping in. The bark held her course by compass truly enough; but even then she scraped against ice which had seemed to lie well to windward of her when she made sail and started forward.

There was only one other direction in which she could sail, and Muras could no more have ordered her course changed to the south than he could have ordered her deliberately sunk. The tall figure of Toivo Ranta held the center of the scene, and the Finn had told the captain to sail north. To

the southward there was no menacing headland to be doubled, yet Muras knew that he must sail north. Northward, Toivo had said, and Toivo knew!

Men who glanced more than once wondered why the Finn did not fall to the deck and break into a thousand fragments of solid ice. As soon as he was released from his work with Mr. Coles, Salvation Sam spoke to Muras about Toivo, hinting at the harm that might befall him through exposure.

"Try to get him away, then," growled Muras.

"Keep her full!" yelled the Finn suddenly. There was a ring in his voice that gave the lie to hints of exhaustion. "Bear away half a point! Steady! Steady! Keep her full ant by!"

Muras shoved Sam toward the companionway door.

"Get to hell off the deck, and let men work the ship!" he snarled, for Toivo had sprung to alert life and was at last piloting the bark in some tangible fashion.

Sam shook his head, but went below. He remembered that he had started aft to speak to Peggy, and she was below. Lute Slade followed him. He had duties to perform—the making and serving of hot food and drink for the skipper and mate. By the heavy jarring thuds of ice outside the hull, the bark seemed likely to be sorely beset before she won clear; and there would be little relaxation of vigilance on deck until those thuds ceased.

Overhead Lute could hear the monotonous footfalls of the Finn. From time to time Toivo's voice rang out, and always Muras answered. Lute smiled a little at that. Perhaps, after all, Muras was not so overwhelmingly masterful.

A snow cloud burst to windward, and on the wings of a mighty blast the blizzard set in. The bark staggered. Under the short canvas of two lower topsails, two reefed upper topsails, a jib, and the spanker, she heeled dizzily, and flew through the smooth water in the lee of the ice. Out ahead, against the frowning face of the headland, the surf beat coldly. Masses of ice rolled and crashed in it. The thunder of it came down the wind, even over the terrific crashing of the breaking floes and the whine of the gale.

Muras and Coles shivered. They pulled on all the clothes they had. Humanely, perhaps, but more probably out of self-in-

terest, the mate flung a fur-lined pilot coat around the helmsman, and Muras gave the man gloves. A comfortable helmsman was a factor for safety.

The Finn still stood there, erect to the blizzard, covered with snow, his cold blue eyes glittering with mysterious fires, as he conned the bark along the pack.

"She ain't goin' to make it!" wheezed Mr. Coles.

"She don't haf to!" yelled Toivo, staggering Coles with the unexpected retort to a remark that he had not been expected to hear.

"Let him be," growled Muras. "He sees something we don't. He ain't going to cast himself away like a fool."

"No tellin' what a crazy man 'll do!" Mr. Coles muttered.

The blizzard blotted out the world. Even the ice was hidden; but they could hear the groaning and crashing of the floes, and could feel the surging rebound of the seas coming back from the unseen headland ahead of them. The bark rolled down to the gale, her sides pounded by masses of broken ice. Men shivered and huddled together for the sense of security that goes with human companionship. The doctor kept a boiler full of coffee bubbling; but coffee could not make the frightened sailors comfortable.

"Ought to rush that Finn afore he drowns us!" grumbled Raupo.

"If I had a gun, I'd take a shot at him!" vowed Tyke Colomb.

"I got a gun, Tyke!" whined Limehouse. "I got one in my bag. I knowed I might want it some day. If I get it, Tyke, will you—"

"Stations for stays!" screamed Toivo abruptly.

"Stand by to go about!" echoed Captain Muras.

Men darted to the gear, full of energy to do anything promising some change from the existing situation.

"Helm's alee!" bawled the helmsman, and the bark swept grandly around into the wind, while the head sails thundered.

The men aft flattened the spanker sheet. Chips led the gang forward to let go the head sheets. Men hammered the belaying turns of the braces clear, and stood ready to let go and haul. While the bark seemed to hang breathless, a twenty-ton cake of ice bumped her bows and checked her swing.

"By God, he's lost us!" swore Muras, plunging at the Finn.

Toivo flung the captain aside like a snowflake. His blue eyes peered through the blizzard, which was impenetrable to others.

"Main-topsail haul!" screamed the Finn, a moment later. While the braces were hauled, he leaped upon the poop rail, crouching into what was apparently a bank of solid snow.

"Shift over ta head sheets!" he yelled next.

As the bark lay down to the gale on the other tack, she sped along a narrow channel in the ice, while great masses of broken floes thundered at her bows, and the sea roared under her.

"Pass to wort along!" Toivo screamed again.

Leaping from the rail, and from the poop, he galloped forward like a frozen knight in armor, to be lost in the snow flurries. The next time his voice was heard, it came from the forecastle head:

"Starb'd!"

"Starb'd!" echoed Muras.

"Starb'd!" muttered the helmsman.

"Steady!" yelled Toivo, and the order was repeated.

"Starb'd a little more! Steady! Port a bit! Port! Steady!"

Ice hammered heavily at the bark. Muras knew that she was undergoing a terrific beating, but he could not counter Toivo's commands. The frozen Finn with the cold, glittering eyes had cast a spell over the skipper, for beyond the spell gleamed gold.

"Go tell Chips to sound the well, and set a gang to pumping if water's making," Muras told a seaman, and stiffened himself to catch the Finn's next command.

XXIV

MURAS entered the saloon, to get a warming drink of grog. He scowled blackly at sight of two vague forms upon the stern transom, and started toward them with an oath.

The interior of the bark was clangorous with the thunder of the ice outside. Under the heavy vibration, glasses and crockery clattered on their hooks and shelves. Great hummocks of ice rose and battered at the thick port glasses; and there was a steady, racking rumble of the straining rudder, sorely tried by the tumbling masses slipping along the run.

Lute stepped from the pantry with a

steaming jug of grog, and Muras halted, with a short laugh of contemptuous relief, on seeing that the second figure on the transom was Salvation Sam. The skipper swallowed the grog greedily.

"Take a jug along to the Finn," he told Lute. "See if he needs any clothes, too. Handle him easy, stoard. He ain't quite right."

"He won't hurt me, cap'n," Lute replied confidently.

"Cocksure, ain't you?" snarled Muras, peering suspiciously at Lute.

"Maybe, cap'n. Anyhow, I ain't scared of him, or of anybody else."

Muras returned on deck, and gazed wonderingly at the steward running along the deck with heavy clothes and a smoking pitcher. Something must have happened to Lute, to give him such assurance; but it was beyond Muras to understand. There was little time or room for conjecture. The bark was sailing fast, but through ice that staggered her; and the snow was a whirling pall of blinding white, which challenged vision at half a ship's length.

Lute came back from the forecastle, appearing out of the veil like a figure flashed on a screen, so suddenly did he break through.

"Drink it?" Muras asked curtly.

"Swallowed a quart of it like milk!" replied Lute, grinning. "Dunno whether he knew anything about it or not. He's starin' out there into the snow as if he sees the Promised Land!"

Chips came aft.

"Makin' plenty o' water, Cap'n Muras," he reported surlily. "She'll open out like a basket if you let that madman drive her through ice this way!"

"Put two gangs to pumping," Muras ordered. "It's drive or drift. D'y'e want to have the ship froze in solid? Pump!"

"The men ain't safe to drive," said the old carpenter.

"They'll pump or drown—tell 'em that!"

"I ain't lookin' fer trouble," grumbled Chips. "Let Mr. Coles tell 'em. I'll lend a hand pumpin'."

The mate, however, refused to go among the men, and it was Muras himself who started the pump gangs. The water gushed copiously. Every fathom the bark sailed, she encountered harder ice and a narrower channel. How the boatswain took her through mystified the captain, for it was

impossible for any other eye to pierce the snow blanket beyond the end of the jib boom. The Finn's uncanny surety of vision, or whatever other guiding sense Toivo depended upon, convinced Muras that at last the end of the voyage was within reach.

"Give the men rum!" he told Lute.

Lute carried a full kettle of scalding liquor to the gang at the pumps.

"Give 'em more!" was the skipper's next order. "Give 'em all they can drink, so long as they keep pumping!"

Evening fell soon, but it made no difference to the piloting of the bark. Men stared in fear at the great masses of ice surging past like ghosts in the vague light. It did not get dark. The snow cast a pallor over all things. The Finn kept his post on the forecastle, calling, ever calling:

"Port a bit! Steady! Luff a little! Steady as she goes!"

At the pumps Limehouse raised a song, for the rum worked in him:

"We'll roll the old chariot along;
We'll roll the old chariot along,
An' we won't lag on behind!"

If the devil's in the road, we'll roll it over him;
If the devil's in the road, we'll roll it over him,
An' we won't lag on behind!"

"There, mister!" laughed Muras, to the mate. "The men are coming back to normal. Everything's going fine!"

"If the blessed bark don't sink under us this night, I'll join Salvation Sam's singin' party!" wheezed Mr. Coles shudderingly.

There came an intermission in the blizzard, and the gale cleared away the snow so that human eyes might see. The wind still blew an icy blast; the skies held more snow; but there was a clear space in the north, and magic lights played and flickered across the arc of the heavens. In it, framed in the center of the display, Toivo stood like a lone god of the frozen waste, straight as one of the masts, his arms folded across his breast. The coats that Lute had taken to him flew back from a single button at the throat, the sleeves flapping empty about his shoulders. While the scene lay plain to view, the bark's forward course lay grimly menacing ahead.

"Holy Jehu!" uttered Muras at the sight, and stared in awe.

"I told ye he'd sink us all!" wheezed Coles. "No ship could bust through that!"

"Port! Port a bit!" screamed Toivo.

"Port a bit!" echoed Muras, fascinated.

"Steady as she goes!"

"Steady it is!"

The pumps clanged steadily, for the grog flowed freely. The men had not been able to do more than glance around them, and their scope of vision from the main deck was limited. They could not see the ice close to the ship. They heard and felt the shattering impact of the encroaching floes, but that was all. They saw that lone figure on the forecastle, heard the piloting commands, and heard the acknowledgment of them from aft.

"We'll roll the old chariot along;
We'll roll the old chariot along,
An' we won't lag on behind!"

A note of boldness had crept into Limehouse's voice. One might imagine him flinging up his head defiantly as he squealed his high notes.

"We'll roll the old chariot along,
An' we won't lag on behind!"

The snow whirled down again, and the lights died out. The bark reeled along, quivering in every frame and plank and fastening as the floes struck her. At times she staggered to a halt, to plunge forward again under the mad drive of her straining, frozen sails.

"Steady as she goes, and holt ta course!" the Finn screamed, as the snow blotted out everything visible. "Ay see it! Ay see it!"

"There you are, mister!" cried Muras, thumping Mr. Coles heavily on the back. "The big Finn's all right! Now jump for'ard and get the foresail set. She'll win through quicker with more sail. The men are all right now. They're singing. Hop to it, mister!"

Mr. Coles obeyed with dubious glee. Singing men were usually safe men, singers inspired by rum did not always run true to form. He strode past the pumps, calling men to loose the foresail. Men rolled after him without protest, and none threatened him. Limehouse ceased his song, and Mr. Coles rather foolishly believed that it was through respect for him.

Four men swarmed aloft over the icy rigging and chopped away frozen gaskets with their knives. The hard canvas crackled and tumbled from the yard, frozen in folds like molded metal. Only the terrific blasts of wind, shaking it free of ice by

sheer violence, made it possible for the men to drag down the sheets and get the sail set in some fashion. It took all the men from the pumps to get the clews down; but Mr. Coles gained assurance with every moment of immunity from harm.

"Come on, bullies!" he bawled. "Stretch the wrinkles out!"

Men hauled and howled. Limehouse left the pumps with the rest, but he was not among the men hauling.

"Give us a tune, Limehouse!" somebody shouted, but there was no response.

"You don't need no tune!" wheezed Mr. Coles, bending to the rope. "Come on, now! Down with it, sons!"

With the added sail, the bark roared through the thickening ice. She staggered and leaned dizzily, her bows riding high upon floating cakes before her weight crushed them and let her down to the sea again.

With all his assurance, Muras grew uneasy. For several minutes no word had come from Toivo. The snow blinded everybody. The men setting the foresail were invisible, though the great spread of canvas made a darker blur against the snow.

"Come aft as soon as you're done, Mr. Coles!" Muras bellowed. "Need your eyes here!"

"Coming now!" yelled Mr. Coles, giving a final glance at the newly set sail.

He turned to trot aft.

Out of the carpenter's shop ran Limehouse, with an adz, wearing a grin of fiendish delight. The men stood back as he darted between them and swung his formidable weapon above the mate's head. Muras, aft, was puzzled to hear a chopping thud out there in the snow, followed by a shivering shriek that was cut off short. Some men cursed beneath their breath. Limehouse uttered a shrill laugh, and shouted loud words of new assertiveness to his mates. Then, while Muras wondered, there arose the sound of the pumps again, and Limehouse's martial chantey:

"We'll take the bloomin' mate an' we'll roll it over 'im;
We'll take the bloomin' mate an' we'll roll it over 'im,
An' we won't lag on behind!"

Muras stopped at the ladder head. The sound of the chantey was reassuring. No doubt the shriek he had heard would be

explained; but Mr. Coles was long in getting aft.

Salvation Sam appeared in the companionway, peering inquiringly.

"Did I hear a cry, captain?" he asked. "Was any one hurt?"

Lute Slade appeared behind Sam, and Peggy clung to Lute's arm, looking frightened.

"The water's comin' over the cabin floor, cap'n!" cried Lute.

Muras glowered at them all; but blackest of all was the glare he bent upon Peggy's escort. He stuttered with fury. Before the words he wanted to say could extricate themselves, the snow ceased once more, and a clear sky shone ahead all in a whirl of mad glory. Sheer across the northern quadrant crackled a curtain of darting fires, high in heaven, reaching down to the sea; and in the center of the arch blazed that most wonderful of northern displays, the corona, like a flaming gateway opening upon an avenue of velvety black sward sprinkled with glittering golden daisies.

The Finn loomed immense against it. His arms were upflung, his wild head was bent back, and from his breast pealed a weird, thrilling paean of triumph. At the same instant the bark crashed against a barrier of ice, reeled to the shock, then burst through and sped into an open and tranquil sea. The fierce wind subsided with magical quickness.

"Yu can shorten sail!" shouted Toivo at last.

Muras leaped with alacrity to order the work. Here at last was the goal!

Men hauled up the foresail and let go the jib and topsail halyards without other guidance than Chips afforded. Toivo left the forecastle and came aft, pausing for a moment to stoop and stare curiously at something that lay prone in the trampled snow of the main deck, with a dark stain all about it.

Salvation Sam saw the boatswain pause, and leaped down the ladder to look for himself. As Toivo reached the poop, Sam knelt beside the ghastly corpse of Mr. Coles, and a piercing cry of frantic distress went up from the missioner. Peggy shrank into Lute's arms, white with fear.

Muras, all grinning, all expectant, met the Finn.

"Good anchorage here, boson?" he queried.

Then his expression took on a slow, queer change. Toivo stared to the north. Muras, following that stare, saw a wide and shoreless sea in every direction but that just traversed. The aurora lights were changing. The corona had faded swiftly. The arched curtain of flame, which had reached the heavens and touched the sea, had risen until the crown melted into the general brightness of the skies. The two ends were fast leaving the earth.

The Finn stared. His light blue eyes blazed. His face writhed insanely, and his strong hands pawed the air with clutching fingers.

"We must sail nort!" he cried fiercely. "Sail nort! We are not near enough. Sail nort!"

Muras suddenly awoke from the spell that had persuaded him to follow a doubtful guidance. He seized Toivo's shoulders in a savage clutch, and shook them.

"Have you been followin' them lights?" he rasped. "Wake up! Snap out of it! You've been—"

"Ay tell yu to sail nort!" replied Toivo sharply, his gaze fixed upon the fast dying lights. "Under ta dancing light is ta treasure of ta Aare Hauta, ant Ay will—"

The Finn's right hand half drew his knife from its frozen sheath. Muras knew all about that ninth notch. He knew that Toivo thoroughly believed that the world would be his when he reached the dancing lights, having in his hand the knife with the nine notches. What Muras had not believed, up to that minute, was that the Finn could be chasing the aurora alone—that there was nothing but the aurora. To know the truth on that point he could dare even that deadly knife in the hands of a madman, to whom a life meant a notch and nothing more.

"Answer me!" he gritted, shaking Toivo until the ice tinkled from the Finn's frozen hair. "You didn't expect to catch up with that damned rainbow? Come clean about them furs, now! I'm calling your bluff, Finn, so cut out the fake crazy stuff. I'm wise to you!"

Toivo slowly turned and looked at the furious skipper.

"Ay have tol yu there was no furs," he said dreamily.

Apart from this simple answer, he paid no heed to Muras's fury. He seemed unconscious of the grip upon him.

Down on the main deck Salvation Sam's

frenzied voice was lifted in accusation against a murderer who refused to step out. Men's voices rose in angry rebellion.

For a second Muras glared into the Finn's cold eyes. Then, swiftly, he let go his grip on Toivo's shoulders, flexed his fingers, and fastened them in a fresh grip on the boatswain's throat.

XXV

THE tall Finn, gaunt and fearsome in his madness, iced and snow-covered until he crackled with every movement, seemed utterly detached from the ship and her affairs as he deliberately, and with evident ease, broke Muras's grip and pushed the captain's hands down from his throat.

Angry men had gathered at the two poop ladders, clamoring that the bark was sinking under their feet, and demanding to know whither they were being led. While Muras held the Finn at grips, the men halted there; but when Toivo so easily flung off the captain's powerful clutch, they rushed, surging between skipper and boatswain like a wave, separating the two men, and facing both. Tyke Colomb led one gang; Chips asserted himself out of sheer professional pride of rank, and headed the other.

Every man there warily watched the fateful knife at the Finn's belt, believing, no matter how crazy the idea might be, that just one notch more was to be cut in the haft of it, and that any one of them might furnish the reason for the notch. Strangely enough, however, Toivo made no attempt to attack any one. Now that his throat was not compressed by furious fingers, he seemed weirdly unconscious of anything unusual in the situation. He stood on the edge of the crowd, still staring to the north. Muras looked at him as if contemplating another assault, but the crowding men prevented that.

"Ay tell *yu*, sail *nort*!" cried Toivo in a shrill, piercing tone.

"Never mind sailin' north!" growled Tyke, pushing forward until he confronted Muras. "Cap'n, this guy's stark crazy! We want some idee o' what *ye're* goin' to do. Never mind about gettin' mad, cap'n. All hands is behind me in this!"

"And the ship's sinkin' underfoot," Chips put in boldly.

"Yus, an' we demand to know what *ye're* goin' to do about it!" Limehouse shrilled, shoving through the press to shake

an impudent and grimy fist beneath the skipper's nose.

Limehouse had suddenly grown bold. Even his shipmates let him through without opposition. Muras glared down at the little dock rat, and his eyes glittered; but he controlled his fury and answered:

"Let me get at that Finn again, and I'll soon be able to tell you!"

"Sail *nort*! Yu must sail *nort*! Yu have not come to ta dancing lights!" cried Toivo.

"There y' are, cap'n—mad as a loon!" snarled Tyke Colomb. "We ain't follerin' no rainbows no farther. You can't tell us you come up into the ice after no such rubbish. What are we after, anyhow? It ain't no good gassin' us about that Finn. He ain't fooled us, an' we don't believe he's fooled you. We ain't been after seals or whales, an' ain't wetted a line or bent a harpoon, though there's such in the ship. We ain't sailin' this bloomin' ship one fathom farther until we has a understandin'. Am I right, fellers?"

"Right y' are, Tyke! Right y' are!" screamed Limehouse, and all hands grumbled assent.

Muras glared at them, but he could do nothing. He stood alone, now that Mr. Coles lay stiff and stark out there in the snow of the red-spotted main deck. Chips was the logical link between captain and crew, and Chips seemed to have decided which side he meant to take.

"If you don't soon get out lines, and moor to the ice again, this bark's goin' to leave us swimming," growled Chips.

"I alus said we'd come to a bad end!" yelled the old graybeard of the forecastle. "What along o' that hussy, and a blessed sky pilot, and a moony-eyed Finn, the hull blasted ship's mad! Damme if I wasn't right. Make the skipper sail back, Tyke!"

"Shut up, useless!" snarled Tyke. "Ain't no wind to sail, and look at that ice we just come through! Cap'n Muras, what about it? We don't set hand to pump or rope until we knows what's doing."

"There's a foot o' water over the cabin floor, cap'n!" cried Lute.

Muras laughed shortly.

"Well, bullies, it looks to me as if you're all due for a cold swim if you won't pump. Is that your last word?"

"Let's pump 'er out, fellers! Then we can talk," whined Limehouse.

The mere thought of that cold swim unnerved the little ruffian.

"Pump! There will be wint to-night!" cried Toivo, suddenly turning and striding from the poop.

One or two men snickered nervously. The Finn stalked along to the forecastle again, and there he stood, bareheaded, with his arms folded across his breast, gazing raptly to the northward, where played the faintest of flickering lights.

"Come, bullies!" cried Muras desperately. "Let him go! I'll attend to him later on. Clear the ship of water, and I'll moor her to the ice until I can see better what to do. If that crazy Finn fooled me, I'll—"

"You ain't been fooled," growled Tyke. "Seems like it's us as has been fooled! We'll get the water out, but don't make any mistake, cap'n—you got to come clean to us!"

"Yus, or else we'll—"

"Shut yer 'ead!" said the silent sailor, who always seemed to be treading upon the little ruffian's heels. "Get at them pumps, my lad, and sing pretty for us!"

"Chips, form three gangs, and work short spells," Muras said. "Make some hot grog, stoard," he told Lute, "and serve it at the pumps. Doctor, make a big pan of hash extra. The men'll work till the water's out and the bark's tied up alongside the ice. You, Colomb, take a crew and clear away the boat to carry out lines. Stir yourselves, lads! The sooner them pumps suck, the sooner we'll come to an understanding!"

On all sides stern need drove them. Muras himself sensed the peril more keenly than the crew, for he knew better than they what it would mean to be set adrift on that broken, unstable field of ice through which they had just crashed. So well did he know it that he led the party mooring the bark, leaving Toivo to his gazing at the sky, but with a grim resolve to come to grips with the Finn when the peril was under control.

The boat carried out anchors and lines, as before; but the first piece of ice turned over as the first man stepped on it, capsizing the boat, and plunging all hands into the bitter sea.

"Only one more day, my Johnny—
One more day!
Come, rock an' roll me over—
One more day!"

Limehouse piped up his chantey at the pumps. With the first chorus came the loud and furious outcries of Tyke and his boat's crew, as their heads emerged from the icy water.

"Lay aft, some o' you wooden men, and heave those men a line! You going to watch 'em drown?" bawled Muras, who was already holding a turn with the hawser to prevent the loss of the sunken anchor.

Sullenly one or two men trooped aft, picking up coils of small stuff as they went, ruthlessly cutting buntlines and downhauls for heaving lines.

"Never mind them, fellers! Pump or perish!" squealed Limehouse, and howled his chantey:

"Don't you 'ear the old man bawlin'?—
One more day!
Come, rock an' roll me over—
One more day!"

"You ought ter be rolled over, you ought!" grumbled the graybeard, his old bones racked with rheumatic agonies, fear for the bitter night to come turning his blood to gall.

"Shut up, old polecat, or I'll crown yer like I did 'im!" snarled Limehouse evilly, nodding his ratlike face toward the bowed figure of Salvation Sam, alone at his task of preparing for burial the gruesome corpse of Mr. Coles, forgotten by everybody else.

Graybeard was not to be quelled. He did not even look. Snatching out the half brick which he had always carried about him since the galley fight, he turned like an old fury upon the little chanteyman.

"You crown me?" he shrilled hysterically. "I'll bash yer maggotty brains out right here!"

Chips stopped that. The old seaman was placed at the farthest end of the opposite pump brake, clear of Limehouse; but the two watched each other like cunning wild beasts, waiting, waiting.

Tyke and his mates were hauled from the sea, but they refused to go out again. They gathered in the galley to thaw out, and fresh men were taken away from the pumps to man the boat. Resentment smoldered. Between the galley, where hot grog and a blazing fire soon compensated for the ducking, and the weary pumps, where men stood knee deep in green, gushing sea water, there ran a subtle current of hostile human passions.

Down in the saloon, Peggy helped Lute

to salvage a hundred things from the submerged floors. She was pale and subdued. All through the terrific passage through the ice, when the bark staggered and shuddered and crashed forward until the interior was a veritable pandemonium of frightful sound, she had felt frightened, but had bravely hidden much of her fear. Now, however, when Muras seemed to recognize that he might have fitted out his ship for a fool's quest, and when the crew openly threatened mutiny, there was an atmosphere of taut stress about the ship which thoroughly terrified her.

As she rescued boots and slippers and carpets from the water slopping about the cabins, she continually watched Lute, and it was not difficult to see where her fears were centered. Not once did she meet Lute's eye—which was no fault of his, for he frequently looked at her small figure and unruly head of hair, so pitifully out of place in the chill misery of the sodden place.

"Peggy, don't it seem to you the water ain't goin' down at all?" said Lute at last. He kept his face toward her, catching a swift glance of her as she involuntarily looked up in answering him.

"That ain't the worst thing, Lute. There's worse than water risin' in this here ship. I'm afraid—for you, Lute!"

"You don't have to be afraid for me," he returned. "I can take care of myself. I'll take care of you, too; but, honest, ain't the water gettin' deeper, Peggy?"

"What if it is? What can we do? Ain't I sweepin' it away as quick as I can?"

Peggy did, from time to time, assault the writhing water on the floor with a broom. It always came back to her. Lute had seen that. He was more farmer than sailor, but even his farmer sense could perceive the peril confronting the Aurora and all her people in that deepening water on the cabin floor.

"Peggy, there'll be murder done in this ship before night, and you ought to be put somewhere safe," he said.

Peggy laughed mockingly, shrilly.

"Murder's sort o' new hereabouts, ain't it? Murder! Lute, murder's served with my breakfast food! I'll feel lonesome when I get back where murder's unfashionable." The girl's nerves were tense, and her eyes held a hard glitter. "Please tell me, out o' yer wisdom, where I ought to go! Somewhere safe! Where?"

"You ought to be out of it," said Lute, blowing on a little charcoal stove in the pantry, trying to hurry up a new batch of grog.

Heavy, sodden steps sounded on the stairs, and Muras clumped wearily down to the saloon.

"Get a move on with that grog!" he snapped. "What you doing down here, anyhow? All hands working like dogs, and you—"

He paused to glare at Peggy. She stood, broom in hand, looking him straight in the eye, and challenging the accusation she saw in his face.

"Well, what?" she cried.

Muras laughed angrily.

"I'll see to you, and to your bully, too, later on!" he promised.

"You don't dare say what you mean, but you're a dirty liar, anyhow!" Peggy hurled at him.

Lute snatched a pot of boiling coffee from the stove, and began to strain it into a jug of rum already mixed with sugar and cloves. Out of a corner of his eye he regarded Muras, and there was a youthful, human, wholly natural light of yearning in the glance—yearning to baptize the skipper with that scalding liquor, for the purification of his tongue.

While yet Peggy's insult rang on the surcharged air of the saloon, loud voices filled the companionway, and Tyke Colomb came stamping down, with others at his heels. Without any preamble, Tyke bellowed forth what was on his mind.

"Muras, we quit! There's too damned much monkey shines in this ship fer us. All hands is workin' out their souls carryin' out anchors and pumpin' and gettin' bullydamned about, and there's that fool parson moonin' over a frozen stiff, there's that little hussy—there she stands now, with her broom, laughin' at our bad luck what she brought us! There's the farmer, too—nice as pie he has it down here, while all hands is sore-handed with—"

"Yer pay is nearly due, my Johnny!
One more day!
Come, rock and roll me over—
One more day!"

Limehouse's chantey broke in again. Muras seized upon that.

"Are you admitting that little rat's a better man than you?" he gibed. "There's a man who don't weaken—"

"He's settin' pretty on the hatch while other men pumps," snarled Tyke. "There's no more to say. We're all agreed, ain't we, bullies?"

The men with him grumbled agreement.

"Then what do ye want?" inquired Muras, suddenly calm.

"Stores! Boats or sleds! 'Bandon ship, 'fore she sinks under us!"

"We've had enough o' this fool v'yage, with crazy men an' crazy ways, an' passons an' women!" added Eke Paral, in the background.

Again Muras attempted to temporize.

"Men, if after I've talked with the boatswain there's no more prospect—"

"We ain't waitin' for no crazy boson's say so, cap'n!" said Tyke grimly. "You brought us all up here on a mad chase after nothing, an' we've had enough. If you don't order boats or sleds, I'll take 'em!"

"That's the talk, Tyke!" the men rejoined gruffly.

Muras's eyes hardened, and his teeth clicked together. It was one thing for hard-worked men to grumble; but quite a different matter to carry it to stark mutiny. He leaned forward, and stepped toward Tyke.

"Get on deck, all of you!" he gritted. "I didn't put all I have into this voyage to be turned back by a pack o' skulkin' dogs! Out with you before I—"

"Out nothing!" retorted Tyke, and shoved a revolver—Limehouse's revolver, stolen from the little rat's bunk—under the skipper's nose. "This is our show-down, Muras! Show yer hand!"

Lute lurked behind the skipper with his grog jug, all steaming. Peggy looked on in silent fascination. Once, while talking, Tyke had met her eyes, and all the fears she had felt before were as nothing to the terror that his gaze awakened in her breast. Now, with the whip hand raised, Tyke looked her way again, and his grin was something not yet achieved by Captain Muras himself.

As the men stood there, facing each other in seething anger, the water slowly rolled across the floor, laving their boots, swishing so gently that only silk chafing against silk could reproduce the sound; but in the moment when the mutineers waited for Muras to show his hand, some drops leaped up and struck the hot stove with a spiteful hiss. One drop leaped higher, and hung hissing a prolonged, serpentlike warn-

ing on the stovepipe, which was less hot than the stove.

The clank of the pumps had ceased. The bark rolled slowly, gently, but with weird suggestiveness. Down below the saloon, in the flooded lazaret, the cold sea swashed to and fro among bags and boxes, cases and bales—bitter, menacing, as if ready to close over the sinking ship.

"All right!" said Muras at length. "You win! Let me go up and finish that madman's business first. Then I'll do as you want."

XXVI

On his way to bring Toivo Ranta to account, Muras passed Chips. The carpenter was playing with his jointed sounding rod in surly fashion, never chalking it, but idly dropping it into the well and hauling it out, in resentful mood.

Forward, sharply outlined against the sky in the gathering dusk, Toivo stood like a graven image of relentless fate, his arms folded, his head up, gazing raptly at the growing and shimmering lights in the sky. He was as completely iced over as any of the masts. No furled and frozen sail looked more like a piece of arctic wizardry than he. Straight to the north he looked, and even with the bark sinking under him no human agency was strong enough to tear his gaze from the fairyland illumination that danced and flickered on the fading line between a cold sea and a foreboding sky.

Chips only watched the fast rising level of the water in the hold. He had looked out across the ice, not toward where Toivo looked, but rearward, where lay the only solid thing in sight. The ice was solid only to the eye, and Chips knew that. He had been on deck while the bark had crashed her stormy way through it, and had seen how she tossed it broadcast, like foam; but it was freezing up now. Two anchors had been securely planted in it, and the bark lay moored to it.

There were possibilities in that ice—far more than in the dark, chill, landless sea to the northward. He was thinking of those possibilities when Muras accosted him, with Tyke and Eke and three more men in the gang.

"Chips," said Muras, "set a fresh gang to work on the pumps, and keep 'em pumping hard. Stooard's comin' right away with hot grog. I'm going to get the Finn, and

if he's got nothing to show we'll abandon ship. Keep her afloat until we can get clear."

"Never mind about the Finn!" growled Tyke, pushing forward, still holding the revolver.

"Ere, that's my pistol!" yelled Limehouse, jumping from the main hatch. "You stole it, you—"

"Shut up!" muttered the silent sailor, and Limehouse sat down hard in the snow, breathless.

"Never mind the Finn," Tyke resumed. "We know he's mad. Let him stay an' drown. Order the boats out, cap'n!"

Muras had mortgaged his all, and all that he hoped to have, in order to fit out the Aurora for the quest of the fabulous fortune that had given rise to wild tales along the water front. Until he could no longer find an atom of excuse—a reason had long since been wanting—he would hold tenaciously to his hope that the gaunt, mysterious Finn was only cunningly cheating him. That Toivo could be cheating himself, by sheer childlike faith in a supernatural, nonsensical myth, Muras could not bring himself to believe.

"I'll order out the boats, men, when I'm through with that frozen fool up for-'ard," he said.

Heedless of what might happen behind his back, Muras sped forward toward Toivo the Finn.

Salvation Sam left the fore hatch, where he had been praying over the body of Mr. Coles, and intercepted the skipper.

"The poor man waits for burial, captain," he said.

"Don't you butt in, you trouble maker!" snarled Muras, flinging Sam aside. "Dump him, and dump yourself, too!"

"Wickedness! Oh, God, turn these men's hearts!" prayed Sam, his face uplifted, sorrow and agony in every line of his ashen features.

Muras leaped up the forecastle head ladder. The dusk was creeping over the ice and the open, barren sea alike. Salvation Sam went back to the dead body, raising it tenderly, talking to it, gentling it. Chips stood gaping surlily at the men. The water poured from the pumps in green, rounded streams, although the weary, mutinous crew barely kept the brakes moving.

Darkness increased with the sharp abruptness of the arctic. From the saloon portholes there glowed the light of a lamp

that Peggy had lighted in fear when Lute carried up his steaming jug of grog. The bark swayed in heavy labor from the burden of water within her.

Some of the sailors stared forward, waiting for some result from Muras's precipitous approach upon Toivo Ranta. Some glowered at Chips, who, by virtue of rank, held authority when Muras was out of reach, since Toivo, the boatswain, was not to be considered. In truth, as carpenter, Chips outranked Toivo, as boatswain; but Toivo was no more in evidence than Limehouse, who still sprawled in the snow on the main hatch, from a shove of the silent seaman's hand.

There was life in Limehouse, though. He had tasted of importance. He had put Coles in his place with an adz—or, at any rate, when Salvation Sam got rid of the corpse, Coles would be in his place; and Sam was doing his very best. Limehouse crawled on his hands and knees, and peered around for the silent seaman. Sam crossed the line of his vision, staggering beneath the burden of the mate's frozen corpse.

"Almighty God, look down upon me now!" pealed from Sam's dry throat.

He raised the long bundle over the rail, looking vainly for somebody to help him. He balanced the body, hesitating before sending it on its last voyage, choking upon the words that he knew he should say.

"Here, parson, I'll say 'is prayers," muttered the silent seaman, leaving the pumping gang. "Now c'mit this body to the deep. Better in hell than in this ship! That 'll launch him proper, Sam. Go get a snort o' grog. Ye're all blue!"

Sam turned away, shuddering, for the man had shoved the corpse out of his hands and into the sea. There was a strange, eerie note about that sudden launching of a human body into the dark, icy ocean, with only the wavering light of the aurora to modify the coming blackness of night. A sobbing note went up from the men at the cold, dull splash. The silent seaman turned indifferently away from Sam, whose face was buried in his hands, and whose body shook with grief.

Then, swiftly, horribly swiftly, Limehouse rose behind the silent seaman, with Chips's adz in his hands, screaming frenziedly, and with a soggy, shivery chop the seaman sank into the snow, his dying curse cut short in his breast. Limehouse let the adz head fall, keeping hold of the handle,

looking around in the growing gloom, grinning, challenging. Behind him crept the forecastle graybeard.

Lute Slade entered the crowd of seamen with his steaming jug of grog. He set the jug down on the head of the pump, for the gang had ceased pumping. He saw the graybeard stealthily raise high a half brick, gather himself to the last ounce of senile effort, and dash out Limehouse's poor puny brains with the brick.

Lute gasped. The men stood aghast. On the forecastle Muras was dimly seen to be at grips with Toivo. Chips sprang upon the fallen Limehouse and snatched up his adz. As a muffled scream of terror issued from an opened saloon porthole, Lute left his grog jug and ran aft.

"Lute, stay here! I'm scared!" cried Peggy through the porthole.

Salvation Sam, who had also heard that muffled cry of fear, shuffled aft through the snow, looking dazed at the swift turn of things.

"Don't git scared, Peggy girl! Sam 'll take care o' you," said Lute, glancing furtively forward at the silent, swaying shapes of two grappling men on the forecastle head.

Salvation Sam plodded on up the ladder, and to the saloon, as sorely in need of comfort as the girl herself. Lute shivered and stood there, looking forward in fascination.

The men had stopped pumping. In the snow lay two reddened bodies, cold and stark. From the forecastle there came no sound save the hard breathing of two giants at grips. In the skies the dancing aurora grew, until it shed a fluctuating illumination over all, painting the snow crimson, touching the stark bodies with flame, setting the ice-beset bark alight with fairy lamps of rainbow hues, in mockery of her puny human inhabitants and their puny little conflicts.

The sailors, who would ordinarily have gathered gleefully to the fight, hung back and watched furtively, as Lute had, uneasy from the awe of it, frightened at the growing, leaping, crackling celestial display that momentarily threatened to flood the heavens. Yet, though they hung back, all could see that Toivo Ranta fought only a defensive fight. Muras attacked him fiercely, tigerishly, straining his every sinew; the tall Finn, his face ever turned north, even in the fight, broke holds, shook off blows, staggered to keep a footing, but

only in an impassive, tolerant way. He made no effort to draw steel. He appeared scarcely conscious of the heavy blows that Muras rained upon his face.

The snow crunched under their feet; they swayed near to the iron ladder. Twice Lute started to go forward, but he was restrained by Peggy, who thrust her hand through the porthole and put it on his shoulder. Then the battling figures fell headlong, whirling over and over, down the ladder, out of the radiance of the aurora into the comparative gloom of the main deck, where they fought on silently, grimly.

"I've got to go!" cried Lute.

He heard Peggy speaking rapidly, desperately, to Salvation Sam inside the saloon. She answered him in swift anxiety:

"Come here, Lute! I need you more'n they do! Come to me!"

"Aye, lad, she needs you. Come!" said Sam, with sonorous fervor.

Lute took alarm at the tense note of those pleas, and ran like one of his farm creatures until he was beside Peggy. She caught his arm with her small, nervous hands. Salvation Sam spoke to him, but Lute scarcely heard. All three gazed through the open porthole at the struggle on the main deck, and all caught their breath the more spasmodically because of it. Peggy spoke, and Sam spoke, but Lute only listened—listened and looked.

"Lute," said Peggy, "there's goin' to be hell let loose here in five minutes!"

"Don't I know it? Let me out, if that's all you got to say!" shouted Lute, turning from the port.

Sam's hand restrained him, like the hand of fate itself.

"My son, you don't belong in the chaos that will rule here. Take the chance, and start over the ice with Peggy. The ship is sinking under us, and the men only stand there leering at more murder being done!"

"Come on, Lute! You'll only get corpsed like the rest!" pleaded Peggy. "Never mind me! I come here of my own free will, but you never ought to be here, anyhow. Get some stores, and—"

"Gosh, look at that!" cried Lute, flinging aside all restraining hands, and thrusting a long, lean arm through the porthole.

Sam and the girl ran to another port and flung it open, for Lute's arm filled the other.

Lute did not attempt to go on deck. The water swashed about his legs midway to

the knees. The bark rolled sullenly, sluggishly, slowly. The water within her hold could be heard like a dirge. The men on her decks heard it before Peggy and Lute and Sam realized how slender a margin remained between floating and foundering.

Gone for the moment was all interest in that tremendous conflict. There was a loud and insistent voice crying up through every aperture in the bark's decks—crying to high heaven a warning to her people.

"Get the boat, fellers! She's goin' down under our feet!" bawled Tyke Calomb, heading a rush to the poop, where the boat had been made fast to the rail, after mooring the ship.

Muras, hampered as he was, sensed the crisis; but he would not loosen his grasp on the Finn. It was the boatswain who started a fresh movement in the now general turmoil. As Tyke led the way to the boat, howling oaths and orders, and as old Chips, closely followed by the panic-stricken doctor, ran after Tyke, jealous of the crooked-legged sailor's leadership, Toivo hurled Muras from him with a pealing, piercing cry, and plunged furiously aft. The Finn's long arms were upraised to the skies, and his gaunt, mad form was luridly outlined against the blazing aurora that filled the heavens with light and sound.

"Sail nort! Yu shall sail nort!" screamed Toivo. "Leave ta boat! T'ree is ta dancing light! Sail nort!"

Fiercely the men swarmed upon him, cursing him, beating him. Muras stormed into the midst of the uproar, seeking his enemy. Sheer numbers made the struggle a mad riot of diverse purposes. Men fought at the rail for the boat painter. Toivo fought them. Muras fought to get at the Finn. Chips struggled for command. The madly dancing lights in the sky, and the terrific crackling overhead, lent the ultimate note of terror to the wild scene.

Then, in the supreme illumination of the aurora at its height, Toivo Ranta flashed forth that fateful knife of his—the knife needing but one notch to make him master of all. Surely his moment had come. His knife was in his hand, and the dancing lights were so vividly near that he could almost touch them.

Men backed away from the Finn. Muras stopped in his tracks. There was a brief interval of silence, when the very sea could be heard creeping up the vitals of the sinking bark.

The ice, freezing slowly from loose cakes into a vast floating field, grated at the scarred planking. Astern, the boat they had tried to take was gently pinched between two stray pieces of ice and cracked like a hickory nut in a hydraulic vise.

XXVII

A LITTLE way apart from the crowd, some men climbed to the boat skids and wrestled desperately with the Aurora's other boat; but the falls, the chocks, and the boat itself were all frozen into a solid, immovable mass.

The sea, which had been open to the north, now glistened under a sheet of thin ice. On the poop Muras and the rest of the men crouched fearfully before the terrific form of Toivo Ranta—a heroic figure of tremendous, insane purpose, facing them with blazing blue eyes and flying golden hair, ice-coated, wielding the terrible knife that lacked one notch.

Salvation Sam knelt in the bloody snow and prayed. In a dark corner one of his late converts, cracking under the stress, howled shrilly:

"I don't keer where they bury me—
Swing them gates ajar!
On the land or in the sea—
Ho, swing them gates ajar!"

Others, led by the thoroughly frightened doctor, stripped the galley of food, heaping it on the deck, hopeful that the men at the second boat would yet launch it and provide a chance to escape from the sinking bark. From the saloon crept Peggy, with Lute and Sam, by way of the main deck door. The abrupt hush over their heads, succeeding the uproar of the crew's rush for the boat that the ice had crushed, had driven them in fear to the open air.

The Aurora lay low in the water. She was bathed in the flaunting glories of the dancing lights. Frozen sails and ice-thickened rigging, glistening spars and white-crusted deck structures, all reflected the magic radiance in a myriad leaping sparks. The heavens were filled with the crackling of the celestial fires, and the sea resounded with the crackling of the restless ice.

"Peggy," said Salvation Sam earnestly, as they stood shivering in the shadows by the door, "let Lute take you away. There's a sled there on the hatch, and the land lies only twenty miles away—yonder over the ice. He won't go without you, and this is

no place for a clean lad to die. Neither honor nor duty calls him to perish here in this awful calamity that is creeping upon the ship."

"I told him that," retorted the girl sharply. "He won't go. I told him I wouldn't go. It was to take care of me you got into this mess, Sam, and I—"

"S-sh! I could not leave these poor souls, even if I wished to, Peggy; but Lute is different. He belongs in a cleaner, sweeter atmosphere. He loves you, Peggy. Why sacrifice him to your—"

Peggy interrupted the missioner with a quick snatch at his hand.

"What do you mean, me sacrifice him? Ain't I telling him to take a sledful of grub and beat it?"

"If you stay, he will stay. You could save him, if all else goes to destruction, by letting him take you away before the end. I'm afraid the end is near, too, Peggy. Don't you feel the heavy, weary sighing of the ship?"

Lute stood halfway up one of the poop ladders, staring in mute fascination at the tableau aft by the wheel—a drama that was fast reaching a climax.

"Gee, Sam!" muttered Peggy. "You do put things in a funny way! Me let Lute run away with me to save him? It sounds like—damned if you ain't right, though! Here, Lute!"

"S-sh!" breathed Lute, with raised hand. "Don't come up here, Peggy!"

Sam had darted back to the saloon, bent on securing warm clothes and food for the sled, in case Peggy should signify her consent. She stood alone, no longer shivering, but warmed and thrilling with the prospect opened to her by the queer twist of Salvation Sam's logic; but Lute's warning was one that no woman could obey.

"Don't come up here!" he said again.

In half a minute she stood panting beside him, the aurora lights dancing in her eyes and setting her hair afame.

"Oh!" she gasped, and gripped Lute's hand with both hers in a desperate clasp.

The crew milled uneasily in a half circle. Tyke Colomb stood a step in front, with Limehouse's pistol in his hand. He had tried to fire it, but the grease had frozen in the mechanism, and the hammer refused either to rise or to fall. He alone knew that. To the rest it was still a pistol.

Muras weaved on wary feet, confronting Toivo, who loomed in the crackling light

like a frozen demon, fury contorting his features. He slashed at the ice-hardened boat painter fastened to the rail, his teeth grinning yellowly.

"Yu shall not quit ta ship! Yu shall sail nort!" he screamed. "Under ta lights Ay shall find ta—"

"Why don't yer shoot 'im?" whimpered the graybeard, almost on his knees with fright.

Muras suddenly leaped, yelling bitter curses on the Finn and his mad belief.

"You and your lights!" he stuttered. "Nine notches you want, hey? Then here, by God, is where you cut the last one! Your damned hokum has ruined me and sent all hands crazy! Show me, you madman—show me!"

Toivo, in imminent proximity to the amazing display of the aurora, was on the very verge of his heart's desire. His fatal knife was raised high above his head as Muras rushed. A long-drawn gasp escaped all hands as the combatants clashed together and the blade descended.

Salvation Sam crept to the ladder again, burdened with a huge bundle of blankets. He pulled at Peggy and Lute, but dropped the bundle with a muffled cry and stood gazing spellbound at the eerie conflict wagging there against the background of the sternward darkness, illuminated in front by such footlights as man could never have conceived.

Just as its point was a bare inch from his throat, Muras caught the descending knife in a steely grip. All the bitterness of disappointed greed, of defeat, of personal rancor, stiffened his arm even against the insane strength of the berserk Finn. The men swayed, locked, the knife flickering murderously near to both their breasts.

"Why don't yer shoot 'em both, an' let's git out?" whined graybeard, on his rheumatic knees.

"Shut yer head! Let 'em fight it out!" growled Tyke, circling at safe distance around the fight.

Tyke was eager to see what would happen when that ninth notch was earned for the magic knife. If something good, he was going to be there, whoever was entitled to cut the notch.

"Can't you stop it?" Peggy sobbed. "Toivo's a good feller, Sam! He's the only man but you as ever spoke kind to me before I come in this damnation ship."

"It cannot be stopped now, Peggy,"

muttered Sam despairingly. Even he could see that such a conflict could only end in one way—by reaching its appointed finish.

"Come away! Lute, take her away! Here are food and woollens, and time is short. Come, both of you children, before it is too late!"

A horrible gurgling filled the ship. Air rushed up from every deck aperture. Ice crashed and growled all about her as she lurched. On the north side, where lay the thin ice, Chips had hurriedly joined in the effort to launch the spare boat, as soon as Toivo had cut adrift the crushed shell floating astern. With axes and a top maul he helped the half crazed men to knock away the frozen gripes and get the tackles free. They raised the stout little craft by a stupendous effort, and just as the bark lurched she swung halfway clear. The boat got away from their weary, frozen hands, and lay balanced across the outer plank of the gallows, teetering, meeting the plank, in falling, with a crash that promised poorly for her seaworthiness. Frenziedly the men struggled to secure it before it shot out into the sea. Others joined them, frightened out of all interest in anything but their lives. Some handed up the stores the doctor had thrown out of the galley.

The conflict had become a grim, silent thing of terror. Peggy watched with parted lips and wide eyes. For the life of her she could not have torn herself away. Lute pulled at her arm, but, when she resisted him, he could not persist. He gazed as raptly as she.

Salvation Sam, breathing prayers, pulled his bundle of blankets over to the hatch and flung it beside a partly completed sled. There was no great fear of anybody touching that little heap, for all the turmoil was on the opposite side of the bark, and no man there dared let go his hand grip on the boat.

Sam crept back to the ladder, and remained to gaze, while somewhere in the shadows a shrill, quavery voice was raised again in hysterical song:

"If the devil's in the road, we'll roll it over him;
If the devil's in the road, we'll roll it over him,
An' we won't lag on behind!
Roll the old chariot along!
Roll the old chariot along
An' don't lag on behind!"

"Oh, Lord!" the singer screamed, when his song was done; and then only a moaning was heard from his corner.

"Look at that!" sobbed Peggy, pressing hard against Lute in her terror. "Look at that!"

The aurora had filled the heavens until it leaned overhead in a wavering, darting curtain of all the hues in the spectrum. It seemed almost within reach. Over the battling men it hung like a gorgeous laurel wreath, to drop upon the victor when victory was won, and its fiery crackling filled the skies with staccato applause.

Toivo Ranta heard the sound. He heard it as the encouragement of all the dread beings of his dreams. The treasure of the Aare Hauta lay close at hand beneath that vivid display. In all the wonders of the heavens he heard and saw but one thing—the consummation of his quest.

To the Finn, it was not a mad, insane quest. It was an earnest search for something sublime, something not to be achieved by puny man through common courses. It was not like the search of Muras—a quest for a treasure of furs belonging to somebody else, who had been overtaken by disaster—a quest impelled by greed. To Toivo Ranta it was like the quest of the Holy Grail. In the crackling aurora he heard a paean of praise for the victor.

He turned his head to gaze at the dancing lights, and his face was alight with spiritual frenzy. Muras felt the sudden lessening of resistance, and fiercely bore down upon the Finn's knife hand.

"Toivo, look out!" shrieked Peggy, tearing at Lute's restraining hands, as she saw the deadly knife point slowly approach the breast of its owner, irresistibly pressed downward by the murderous strength of Muras.

Toivo flashed a glance toward the girl, but seemed indifferent to his peril.

"Ay shall bring yu a golt ring, for yu—" he began.

Then Muras gained the vantage he had striven to get.

"You'll bring hell!" he snarled. "You've brought hell enough! Nine notches? Cut—one—now!"

Peggy screamed. Salvation Sam stopped praying. Lute gasped. Tyke Colomb backed nearer to his followers.

Muras put every ounce of power remaining in him into the arm that strained against Toivo's knife hand. There was an instant when the knife seemed frozen in air. Then it darted downward, and the blade appeared to be snapped off, so swift-

ly was it thrust into Toivo's bare, hairy breast.

Blood spurted upon Muras's fingers, and he leaped back with a shaky laugh of triumph. Every witnessing eye saw, for a moment, the handle of that fatal knife standing straight out from Toivo's flesh, while its owner's blue eyes glared down at it witlessly. Onlookers, knowing the tale, might imagine, if they could not see, a ninth notch being carefully carved in the dark, silver-studded wood of the protruding haft.

A fearful cry burst from Toivo's throat. His eyes blazed with ecstasy. The light of the aurora played over his face, touching it with a grandeur which effaced the madness. His hand clutched the knife haft, and terribly he plucked at it, while the blood ran over his fingers. He cried again, triumphantly, as the blade leaped out to his fierce pull; but the slippery blood robbed him. While his fingers groped and his mouth gaped, the knife flew into the air, straight out toward the flaming, dancing lights. With his life rattling within his throat, Toivo reached out, staggered, and leaped after it.

Everybody on the poop went to the bark's side as the thin ice was shattered and the cold, dark waters closed over the Finn. With his going, as if his magic was indeed real, the aurora lights faded and swiftly disappeared.

In the growing darkness men moved in fresh terror, muttering, praying, as they had heard Sam pray. Muras and Tyke Colomb ran into each other. Both on edge, each holding long nursed grievances, they banded rough words, changed from words to blows, and soon another battle was afoot in the dark, with the ship already rolling to her end.

XXVIII

"SAM, he's dead! He's gone!" panted Peggy, following the missioner's tenderly guiding hand toward the hatch. "Toivo's finished!"

"Rest his soul, my dear," replied Sam earnestly. "I'm afraid he'll never bring you that golden ring."

"To hell with the ring!" cried the girl angrily, flinging around upon Sam. "All I hope is that he's found his treasure, wherever he's gone. Toivo never treated a girl like a bit o' dirt. He was my friend!"

Peggy broke down and cried convulsive-

ly, while Lute helped Sam to guide her to the landward rail, and Muras and Tyke fought like wolves near the poop ladder.

"Lute, my son, yonder lies the twin headland," said the missioner, pointing across the rugged ice through which the bark had crashed. "Muras told me he saw E——no there while he was out with the sled. He couldn't reach them, because the ice——ain't formed inshore; but now it has. Go, my boy, and God go with you! Take care of Peggy. She is my ewe lamb!"

"Take care of me? I can't take care of myself," cried Peggy, crying with herself for her breakdown.

Lute gazed aft at the frenzied men grappled in conflict while the bark wallowed underfoot at the point of foundering.

"It ain't right to quit—" Lute began to mutter.

Peggy met Sam's quick glance, and burst forth:

"Lute, you've got to get me out of this! I'm scared stiff. I think the ship's sinkin' right now. Lute, take me away!"

"Why don't yer shoot 'im?" again shrilled the old graybeard on the poop.

The swaying figures were vague in the darkness that followed the aurora's fading; but they were near enough for black shapes to be visible, and there was one creeping shape, low down in the trampled snow, which moved about the feet of the fighting men and the eager onlookers. The combatants fell and rolled over, stumbled to their feet and fell again, wrestling wordlessly, their labored breathing sharply audible, even above the terrific reverberation of the packing ice and the ominous groaning of the bark.

"Hurry, Lute!" whispered Salvation Sam.

"For Gawd's sake be quick, Lute!" breathed Peggy.

Together they tumbled the sled—which had only one runner—over the rail to the ice, and Sam passed the blankets and the food over to them in a bundle. On the opposite side of the ship Chips and his frantic mates struggled with the heavy boat, which was jammed between rail and gallows, and which was broken worse with every effort made to extricate it. The doctor was trying to ignite a slush flare, for light to work by.

Lute fumbled with cold fingers to lash the bundle to the sled, and Peggy helped him to little purpose. The ice cracked be-

side the bark as she leaned toward it in her labor.

"Hurry!" cried Sam.

"Ar-r-rh, now I got it. Watch me!" screamed the graybeard, aft.

Men turned to look, for there was crazy elation in that note, and all hands wanted cause for elation.

"Come, Peggy! Sit on the sled, so I can wrap you warm," said Lute anxiously.

"What do you think I am?" snarled Peggy. "Here, gimme one side of that pullin' rope! I ain't a passenger. Come on—start! We'll all be rolled under the ship in a minute!"

The doctor's flare flicked weakly, promising to blaze up.

"Go, and God go with you!" cried Sam, standing at the rail with hand upraised, the new flare making a hazy, dancing halo about his lean, gaunt figure and leonine head.

The graybeard crawling in the snow of the poop had picked up the useless revolver that Tyke had dropped in disgust; but the old sailor did not know that Tyke had been unable to fire it. He pulled on the trigger, aiming wildly, with a gleeful grin of senile vengeance for real or fancied wrongs. With the sinister luck that fate sometimes holds in store for the most useless, this time the pistol went off, and Muras was suddenly left standing alone, staring down at Tyke Colomb, who was coughing out his life and clutching at the victor's knees.

The graybeard's cracked laugh shrilled out.

"Now I'll show ye, bullies! Foller me! I'm yer boss now!"

That awoke the men as nothing else could. Many things might happen to their hurt, but none of them would submit to such leadership as that. There rose a growl that sent a shiver along Lute's spine.

Muras backed slowly away before the menace of the pistol. The doctor's flare blazed up into vivid yellow light.

"Good-by, Sam!" cried Peggy.

"Hurry, my child!" groaned Sam.

Peggy and Lute dragged the sled out from the shelter of the bark, and into the bright light of the flare. Somebody saw them, and shouted. Lute broke through the ice, between two cakes imperfectly frozen, and Peggy sank beside him to her knees. The shout that followed them was not repeated. There was no desire to follow them over such a trail.

Plunging on, Lute staggered clear of the broken floe, dragging Peggy with him. They were wet to the waist, and the darkness outside the narrow circle of the flare was terrifying.

"Cheery does it, Peggy!" cried Lute, battling with all the courage in him.

"Cheery it is!" gritted Peggy, striving to shut out from her ears the uproar rising from the bark.

Down the frosty air floated the sonorous voice of Salvation Sam, alone in the midst of madness and creeping death, singing for the comfort of any who might hear:

"Lead, kindly light, amid the encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on;
The night is dark, and I am far from home;
Lead Thou me on.
Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene; one step enough for me."

"I wish you'd get on the sled, Peggy," Lute panted; gaining fresh strength from the grand hymn that filled the air.

"Save yer wind, and pull!" retorted Peggy. The hymn had made her choky. "Perhaps I won't be able to pull presently. I ain't used to walkin' in this stuff."

They struggled on, until near the edge of the circle of light. The going was rough and hard.

"How far is it to land, Lute?"

"Sam said twenty miles."

"Think we can make it, Lute?"

There was a wistful, uncertain note in Peggy's query.

"Think?" he echoed. "Sure we will! Ain't I got to get them Eskimos to come out again and help me save them fellers back there?"

"Oh, Lute, I knew you wasn't goin' to quit 'em!" cried Peggy.

With tightly clenched teeth she set her small body fiercely against the sled rope and pulled.

On the Aurora, Salvation Sam watched them merge into the blackness beyond the light as he concluded his song.

The graybeard had twice pulled trigger again, without effect, when Muras realized that the weapon was harmless, and gathered the would-be leader to him in a terrific grasp. Sam turned to look just as the skipper heaved the ancient upon the rail, cursing at the men standing foolishly by.

"What are you standing there for?" Muras yelled. "Break out stores and blankets, since ye won't pump! D'y'e want

to drown? Wait till I get rid of this old Jonah, and I'll show you!"

Salvation Sam stumbled up the ladder and pulled the graybeard inboard. Muras was almost spent from his two terrific encounters, and could do little more than glare at the missioner.

"The Almighty is giving you precious moments, and you waste them in doing evil!" boomed Sam. "Don't you hear the bark groaning in her death throes? Lead these helpless men! You are the captain. You are the guardian of their lives!"

Muras's head sagged forward. He had been driven on by a tremendous, savage passion of hate and disillusionment, and by the lust of physical conflict. Now, too late, he knew that the end could have been forestalled only by swift and unceasing effort. He nodded to Sam and let the graybeard fall to the deck.

"Leave that busted boat, 'Chips'!" he shouted, after a rapid survey of the bark's condition. "Heave all the hatch covers out on the ice. Get stores and blankets on to them before the bark goes from under your feet. Then, if there's time, chop that gallows adrift, and heave it on to the ice too. Jump, you helpless lumps!"

The doctor fed his flare, crying crazily for fuel. The light grew red, shot with green, and then leaped brightly to golden yellow again. Muras himself waded into the dangers of the flooded storerooms and flung out boxes of food. Salvation Sam passed from group to group, lending a hand, speaking a word of cheer where no cheer was, uttering a prayer when the moment seemed to be the last, and between whiles singing to stir flagging hearts.

'Chips tore off a hatch tarpaulin, and the covers burst off, forced up by the pressure of air above the water in the holds. Directly above the doctor's flare bucket a great icicle hung from a stay. The heat loosened it, and it fell, knocking the bucket over and spilling the fire, to be extinguished in the snow.

"Gawd 'elp us! That's done it!" whimpered the graybeard, crawling along from the poop and groveling at Sam's feet.

The men went into a panic. The darkness was terrible. The open hatches let out a soughing, swashing, moaning sound, as if all the drowned souls of the watery world were in torment down below.

"Stand fast, bullies! No danger! There ain't water enough here for us to

sink much farther. Get that flare lighted, doctor!"

Muras was brave enough. He could command and encourage, if he chose. Even while the darkness gripped the bark like an evil thing, he had taken the deep sea lead line to try the depth, hoping against hope to find shoal water. The lead slipped through the thin ice, and the line whizzed through his hands. At the very moment when he uttered his assurance to the crew, the ultimate end of the one hundred and twenty fathoms of line flew out of his clutch with a sardonic whir, leaving him speechless and aghast.

The doctor's flare flickered, wavered, and flared anew. Men muttered and cursed. Another besides the graybeard whimpered. The water was at the scuppers. The Aurora leaned ever so gently away from the ice, and a hawser snapped with a twang. Men rushed for the higher side of the bark, clambering over the bulwarks, slipping and scrambling for the ice.

"Every man for himself!" roared Muras, for the bark leaned giddily.

Water poured in through the scuppers. Water poured out from the lip of the pumps. Salvation Sam swung himself up on the rail, and exhorted the sailors to courage and coolness. Ben Muras, for all his shout of every man for himself, took place beside the missioner, and helped the men over the side, even while cursing them for skulking rats.

The spars discharged their artillery of ice and frozen snow as they swung to the steep angle of the bark, bringing up jerkily on the braces. Men were felled and knocked from the rail by the cutting shower. Salvation Sam reeled, and almost fell under the weight of a mass of snow that dropped out of the poorly furled mainsail leech. It halted his exhortation; but when Muras had helped him back with a growl, Sam carried on, and a shivery voice here and there bore witness that men were comforted by his cheery voice:

"Pull for the shore, sailor, pull for the shore; Heed not the rolling wave, but bend to the oar. Safe in the lifeboat, sailor, cling to self no more; Leave the poor old stranded wreck and pull for the shore!"

"There she goes! Jump for it!" yelled Chips, out on the ice, as the last hawser snapped and the bark began to settle by the head.

The last man tumbled down the side of

the bark and was dragged clear, just as a vast mass of ice cracked away from the field under the leverage of the sinking hull. Chips, and what men could find wit enough in the sudden darkness that fell with the second and final spilling of the doctor's flare, hauled the planks, the hatch covers, and the stores away from the black and menacing water.

But the Aurora was not yet dead. She staggered upright and slowly rolled the other way—rolled until her lower yards swept among the men and skittled them over.

Things were hurled from the bark's superstructure to the ice, falling among the sailors, who dared not run in any direction in the darkness. They could only creep away from the water when it wetted them.

"Keep together, bullies! You're safe as fish in hash, if you don't get adrift!" Muras shouted, grimly humorous.

A sailor cried out that his leg was broken. Something falling from the bark had hit him. Salvation Sam crawled over to the man and found him unhurt. The graybeard screamed that he was killed. Nobody troubled to go to him.

The bark broke away the ice in great pieces every time she moved, and her movements were queerly uncertain. There was no lantern, no means of making a light, among the stores saved. The stars were only just beginning to conquer the blackness that succeeded the fading of the auroral lights; but against the starry sheen the leaning spars were visible.

The bark's black hull lay flush with the sea at the bows, while the stern rose a man's height above the ice. Once, in her sluggish writhing, she pressed her counter upon the ice edge, and broke off a sheet of ice whereon much of the salvaged gear lay. The castaways moved in panic from that place, keeping touch by actual groping, none knowing at any moment when another convulsion of the dying bark would shatter the floe to which they clung.

In this desperate crisis Muras revealed the stuff he was made of. He had gambled and lost, and he realized it. The bitterness had not left him, but at least he showed that he laid none of his troubles to the sailors he had shipped.

"Men, it's safer if you separate a bit!" he shouted, keeping a grip on Salvation Sam's sleeve. "I know I told you not to separate, but the ice is breaking up. The

bark's about gone. When she goes, she'll make a wash that'll bust the ice more. Move apart, bullies! Each of you take a mate. Every two take a bit of plank. Don't none of you crowd more'n two to a piece of ice. Sam and me'll serve grog and divide the grub, and then if things look bad—well, I guess Sam'll have to pray for us all!"

Muttering helplessly, the men obeyed as well as they could. The trouble was that few wanted to take the man nearest as a mate.

The sinking bark weltered. The sea beneath the ice heaved in sympathy with her struggles.

Two by two the men adjusted themselves. Muras found himself coupled with Sam. Eke Paral and Raupo forgathered from sheer stark misery. In this culminating catastrophe both had lost whatever spirit they ever had. Muras hauled the stores upon his piece of ice, with Sam's help, and rummaged for the bottles of rum that he had passed up from the storeroom.

The aurora suddenly flamed in the north. It illuminated every haggard, fearful face on that desolate field of ice. It lit with awful fire the leaning, sliding ship called by its name. Men gazed at it, rapt, fascinated. It seemed to embrace the bark and encompass her with guarding flame.

Then she sank—by the head, then leveling, and by the stern, rolling slowly over, once to iceward, once to seaward, to settle finally on an even keel in the brightest glare of the dancing lights, and to sink rhythmically, solemnly, to her death.

A groan went out on the frozen air. The three masts slipped down through the thin, crackling ice which the yards encountered outside the limits of the hull. The graybeard uttered a shriek of mad merriment. He alone had not been chosen for a mate by any man; but in the last roaring light of the aurora he had found a comrade. He was seen clasping the dead body of Tyke Colomb, whom he had killed.

"Tyke an' me's bound hellward together!" he shrieked. "Tyke killed ol' Poke Bonnet, as was my chum. I killed 'im, an' Gawd has give him to me to take to hell! Down ye come, Tyke, ye ol' son of a gun!"

The piece of ice on which he crouched turned over slowly in the eddy made by the sinking bark, and the graybeard and his dead shipmate slowly turned with it.

The survivors crowded together in fright. Muras feverishly hunted for the rum. That alone could stave off a panic which might drown them all; but there was no rum. The aurora was fading from the sky. It was as if the heavenly display had been ordered solely to mark the obsequies of the bark Aurora.

Muras laughed harshly, and stood up. "Lads," he cried, "there's no rum. It looks as if it's up to Sam!"

XXIX

BESIDE the twin headlands a still, windless dawn broke over a huddle of snow huts. An oil lamp burned in each hut; but in one there were two lights, and many people—stolid, fat, greasy-looking little people, who stripped the frozen clothes from Peggy Bolter's bruised and chilled body with an indifference to sex that shocked poor Lute Slade and drove him out into the snow, hotly embarrassed.

Fat little men had come out in answer to his call, and had dragged Peggy and him up the shore with their broken sled. Lute had been unable to do more than shiver while they rubbed him with snow.

That had been a sled journey to remember, since it was survived. Peggy had gone down fighting to the last utterance of her sharp little tongue against being carried; but there came a time when she tottered to her knees, and could go no farther. Then Lute packed her on the sled and stumbled on.

"I got to git you safe!" he muttered. "I got to git you safe!"

In turn he had fallen. The traveling was hideous in the darkness, and with black water between the ice floes. He had struggled to his feet twice, and had fallen again, before Peggy awoke from a half swoon to realize his condition. She, in turn, dragged him to the sled and painfully set her puny weight to the load.

"You got to get help for them men!" she panted. "You got to get help!"

Toward dawning she fell again. She lay in the snow for five minutes before Lute broke through his stupor to find the sled at a standstill. The last mile had been a horrible nightmare. In the wan light he saw the girl's small face pinched and blue. The ice near the shore was broken and mushy, too. When his quavery cry had brought out two winking, startled furry folks, who could not be distinguished as man or wom-

an, Lute was plunging waist deep in the freezing sea, carrying Peggy in his arms.

But now she was safe. In the brief glance that Lute had before his embarrassment drove him out, he saw the strange fur-clad creatures ministering to the girl in workmanlike fashion.

Then he set about to make the Eskimo understand about the sinking bark. Lute was shaky at the knees, and some of his fingers and toes stung and throbbed warningly; but he had spent his boyhood years on a Western farm, and he reckoned cold and weariness of small account when there were things to do. Even had he not meant to take assistance out to the edge of the ice, in hope of saving his shipmates, Peggy had made it his plain duty.

He did not quite understand the girl. He did not care to. She had begged him to quit the ship to save her; and all the way over, while she had speech, her insistent cry was for haste, because he must hurry back with help. So long as Peggy said so, that must be his law.

He contrived to gather twelve Eskimos, who possessed a vast and apparently unwieldy contrivance formed out of whale-rib runners fastened to a pair of skin boats lashed side by side. He thanked the hard luck that had lost him most of his stores in landing; for the chief man had fallen in love with a solitary can of marmalade, and Lute managed to convey to him that the bark held much more, which might be legitimate loot, if no time was lost.

A small, fine snow was falling, and the sky was utterly windless. Lute bundled himself up in furs that the Eskimos gave him, and saw the sled ready. Then he peeped inside the snow hut, to tell Peggy that he was going.

The hut was stiflingly warm, and smelled fiercely of fish oil and unwashed humanity. The two oil lamps gave forth a smoky, pallid glare, in which the small round interior gave the impression of a smoky soap bubble; but Lute's love-sharpened eyes pierced the haze. There was a low shelf of snow on one side, piled high with furs. On it lay Peggy, bundled up like one of the Eskimos. Wan and weary she looked, but her eyes sparkled. She held on her breast another furry bundle, out of which winked two of the blackest Eskimo baby eyes that ever snapped to snow.

At sight of Lute, her own black eyes snapped, too.

"You here yet!" she cried, in something very like her usual pert voice.

She let the Eskimo baby tumble over beside her, as if ashamed that Lute had seen her in so soft a moment.

"Just come to tell you good-by," stammered Lute. "You all right?"

"Well, my Gawd!" quoth Peggy irritably. "Don't you think I'm able to take care of myself?"

Poor Lute vanished. He did not see that her eyes softened after him, and that she told the fat Eskimo baby something very, very secret when he had gone; but he did know that when the sled started out the cold seemed less severe, the snow less blinding, the ice less hummocky, because of the look he had surprised in her dancing eyes on his entrance.

The Eskimos shook their heads stolidly when he pointed to where the Aurora ought to be. The snow obliterated everything at half a mile. Even on a clear day they could not have seen the bark. The chief man, in guttural sounds reënforced by gestures and fat, uncouth shrugs, indicated that several days ago he had seen a ship, but it had sailed into the ice and vanished.

Lute tried to make clear the fact that she had not vanished, or, at least, had only just vanished; that many men were out there on the ice, helpless; that much mar-malade and lard might be secured if only they would hurry.

The snow thickened as they proceeded. When the black, frowning shape of the twin headlands melted away into gray, then to white, and then to invisibility, there was nothing but a small and narrowing circle of whirling whiteness, in which the ungainly sled and the squat, muffled figures moved grotesquely. The going was slow and heavy. Lute wondered how straight they were going.

He speedily discovered how cunning had been the brain that devised that boat-sled on the whale-rib runners. Time after time the Eskimos steered a course aside from the line that Lute would have taken, and took advantage of floating ice and fairly open water to use boat, instead of sled.

But he felt afraid. There was absolutely nothing by which one might hold a course. Many times he argued with the leader that men lay out there in the freezing wastes, and that time was precious. The only replies he received were guttural grunts and shrugs.

Lute grew skeptical. As a sailor, he had never mastered even the elements of navigation. As a farm boy, he had known what it was to be lost in the woods and to be caught out on the prairie at night; but somehow those adventures seemed different to this blinding, trackless whiteness, in which one moved as in the windless core of a cyclone. Soundless the air was—so utterly soundless that the whale-rib sled runners sent crackling reports rolling and rebounding out over the invisible ice; yet the falling snow had that strange quality of seeming to whirl all about the party.

"Old feller, I think you got us lost!" he cried at length.

The Eskimo shrugged, and suggestively licked his thick lips. It was an eloquent argument, but still Lute felt dubious. The snow was bewildering, and the ice grew rougher.

For a moment the sun was seen. It was when the party had traveled ten or twelve miles. Pale yellow it was, like a splash of good butter on a wall papered with flour bags. It had no heat, no light; but it was the sun. When it had merged again into the opaque heavens, Lute abruptly remembered that by the sun he might have got an idea of direction; but after a moment of self-reproach, he also realized that a sight of the sun meant nothing to even the smartest navigator or guide, unless the direction of the objective or the departure were known, and he knew neither. When leaving the sinking bark, he had followed Sam's direction, and had kept the glow of the doctor's flare behind him, until it died. By that time he was within vague sight of the loom of the land, and the snow was not yet falling; but now—

The Eskimo leader stopped. His comrades gathered about him. Lute crowded near. He thought they were giving up. They were not—yet; but, surprisingly, there boomed out upon the still and ghostly air a voice. It frightened Lute. There was something unearthly in it.

He listened. The Eskimos glanced from one to the other, not at all comfortable. The leader glanced at Lute.

The young Westerner was nonplused. Never had he heard such a resonant, carrying, arresting sound. It was not human. It was not bestial. It was surely not celestial; and yet—and yet—

Lute listened. Then he shivered. It was a voice such as he had heard while

Toivo Ranta lived his dream. He half expected to see the flaming aurora flood the heavens with crackling fire.

The Eskimos stopped in their tracks. The ice they traversed was freezing up into one solid field, but it shook to a strange, insistent underrunning impulse. The vast, booming note came down to them through the windless curtain of falling snow. It was not a boom, it was not a voice—it was a terrible, far reaching, soul-stirring, thunderous bellow.

"Ugh!" grunted the leader, and trudged ahead, with Lute at his heels.

Lute could not understand it, but he felt that as long as the fat little Eskimo showed no fear it was not the part of a man of the wide prairies and the salt seas, a man having such responsibilities as he had, to hang back.

For another half mile they hauled the big sled, full of furs and bladders of oily unguents. The great voice had died away for a while; but it came again. It filled the air. The ice gave forth queer shivers. Lute's party stopped short. The leader forgot to lick his fat lips.

Lute cocked his head aside, and raised a hand, listening. His face was white. He shivered. That voice reminded him of Salvation Sam's promises of heavenly wrath. Out there in the white wastes, it sounded like the voice of God crying in the wilderness. Lute bowed his head, helpless.

"Almighty God! Look down upon thy servant, and lend him a hand to guide his flock!" the voice suddenly bellowed forth. It rose from a quavering pipe of weakness to a commanding plea to a God long worshiped. "Here we are, lost in the snow, burdened with men cold and despairing, striving toward the light. Give us a hand, Lord, so that we may not perish! Lads, let's sing to the Lord!"

Lute started into life. As he hauled the Eskimo into smartened effort, he yelled, as much to urge the Eskimo as to send comfort to the owner of the voice:

"That's Salvation Sam! Hurry! Hooray, Sam!"

Then came Sam's voice in song, vibrating, bellowing, and holding a note of triumph.

"What did I tell you, lads? Sing, you lubbers! Muras, sing!"

"There's one more river, and that's the river of Jordan!
One more river—there's one more river to cross!"

What a medley was that! There were voices almost at a gasp. There were rumbling, surly voices. There were voices without music. There were voices that had no tune and no volume, but only frenzied hope.

"If I get there before you do—
One more river to cross!
I'll ask the Lord to pass you through—
One more river to cross!
There's one more river, and that's the river of Jordan!
One more river—there's one more river to cross!"

"Come on, fellers, it's them!" yelled Lute, and dashed ahead into the blinding murk.

Salvation Sam tottered out of the snow veil, holding Muras's arm about his neck, while Muras staggered under the weight of a frozen seaman. Eke Paral and Al Raupo supported each other, singing crazily but obediently. The doctor and old Chips fought off each other's offers of assistance, stubbornly tottering on. In couples they came, every man dragging a bit of gear that might yet be their salvation. Every parched, constricted throat gave up a breath of precious life to prove to their leader that he was as good a man as the next.

"One more river, and that's the river of Jordan!
One more river—just one more river to cross!"

"Fellers, it's me!" yelled Lute, and led his rescue party in a mad rush to gather in the tottering castaways.

Muras peered from under iced brows, grinning with exhaustion. He stumbled to his knees under the weight of his burden, because Salvation Sam suddenly went to his knees there in the snow and flung his hands heavenward.

Sam had no words left, but his face was alight with ecstasy. Lute and his party tumbled the beaten men upon the big sled, while the Eskimo leader searched all around for the lard and marmalade that did not seem to be forthcoming.

Few words were said. Men do not say much in such a case. The doctor slapped Chips on the back, and called him a disgraceful name. Chips laughed shakily. The doctor dropped his bundle, and the Eskimo leader pounced upon it. The doctor being, with all his faults, a ship's cook, his bundle contained more fat and slush than anything else. The Eskimo looked disappointed no longer when he opened it. He

licked his fat lips. The doctor cared nothing for his loss, for Lute was forming the party for another start.

And so they came to the shore beneath the twin headlands.

Muras gazed at the frowning cliff in silence for a while, as the little fur-clad people guided him to the village. Salvation Sam was eagerly inquiring after Peggy, his little ewe lamb, and Lute was as eagerly promising to take him to her as soon as tottery legs could obey.

"Sam, you win!" said Muras quietly. "There's nothing in greed. I'm broke. I can't pay the men as are saved. I'm no better off than them. I thought I'd get something belonging to somebody else, and I gambled on it. If we ever get clear of this frozen dump, just tell all hands I'll make good, Sam; and if you'll give us your hand—"

Sam stumbled after Lute into the village. Outside the outer snow hut a white-furred, red-cheeked, bright-eyed little person met them, walking queerly in her unaccustomed encumbrances of fur.

"She driv me out," said Lute. "I dunno quite how I stand; but I know she was playing with a black-eyed kid, and she looked as if she'd like to have it call her mammy. Say, Sam, d'ye think she'll want to go home with me and meet my folks? She's a great kid, Sam! Course, I'm nothing but a farmer. I ain't a sailor. There ain't nothing—"

Poor Lute pitched forward into the snow, beaten at last. Even his young farm-bred and sea-fostered strength could not sustain him longer.

When he opened his eyes again, it was in a smoky place that looked something like a big soap bubble, and a pair of very black, very gleaming eyes were close to his. He felt warm, sweet breath on his face. A small, hot hand played somewhere about his temples; and the soap bubble was thronged with faces.

"He's awake, Sam! He's been playing dumb!" cried Peggy Bolter's voice, in all its accustomed pertness; and the black eyes, the sweet breath, and the red lips that somehow grew out of both drew away from their proximity to Lute's face, and left him in the dark again.

"Lute, my son," said Salvation Sam gently, "Peggy's been waiting for hours to tell you that there's a mission post a short

sled journey distant, and we can all be sent home in a month."

"Well, what did she run away for, then?" Lute demanded peevishly.

"My son," said Sam, "you are the only man I ever knew Peggy to run away from. In the ordinary run of feminine logic, then, you're the only man she wants. She's shy, Lute, shy!"

At Sam's urging, Lute went outside the hut and found Peggy. It is neither here nor there what they had to say. Why should their little secrets be blazoned to the world as on a silver sheet for the ribald to make merry over?

In fifteen minutes Lute sought Sam again. The missioner had news.

"We start to-morrow, Lute, and soon we shall all be happy!"

"Maybe," said Lute unhappily. "Peggy won't let you marry us before we go."

"My son, there be many dark and devious ways in a woman's mind. One way is her own way. She'll follow that, never fear; and it may be you will yet admit that it is a good way. Son, I counsel you to have faith!"

Lute suddenly brightened. Sam looked so happy.

"I know!" he cried. "She wants you to marry us at your mission!"

"That would be my supreme happiness, Lute," replied Salvation Sam, with glowing countenance. Sam's face had become haggard and drawn, his eyes were sunken, but he retained all the genuine and unselfish fervor that had supported him in his mission at home, through the amazing voyage of the Aurora, and up to that moment. "But Peggy, my ewe lamb, sees beyond even my humble desires, and decides in a way that seems better."

"What could be better?" demanded Lute. "You've been her friend, haven't you?"

"All her life," Sam replied warmly; "and by her decision she has shown that she has the sterling heart I always knew beat in her small body. Lute, she says that when we get home I shall take her out to where your folks live. It will give you time to think the matter over. Then, if you still feel the same way, she will marry you there, in your own church, and I shall officiate. Isn't it best, my son? Hasty loves are fleeting loves sometimes."

Lute glared at Sam. Then his glare changed to a softer, saner glow.

" You are right, Sam, in lots o' things," he said. " Maybe that would be best—for some folks; but"—Lute towered over Salvation Sam to his full, gawky height, a new manliness enveloping him—" but, Sam, you ain't near the truth in this. You get Peggy right here, and, if you ain't got a book, you can marry us with the same sort of prayer as you guided them fellers across the ice with! If that ain't good enough for God A'mighty, it's good enough for us!"

THE END

Salvation Sam smiled gently, and laid a hand on Lute's shoulder. Peggy had somehow drifted back into near view.

" Come here, Peggy," said Sam. " The lad's worthy. Have no fear, my children—the Lord will find it good enough. Peggy, do you want him?"

Peggy Bolter crept into Lute Slade's arms with a radiance in her small, pert face that could have not been surpassed by the Supreme Mother of all men.

A FISHERMAN DREAMS

WITH my own eyes I saw the maid,
With my own hands I touched her hair;
I trembled, but was not afraid;
Shy was her look, and she was fair.

Oh, she was shyer than the girls
Of this my home—my island home;
And comelier—oh, far! Her curls
Were amber like a honeycomb.

I found her, fishing off that reef;
She looked up smiling from my net—
A slow, grave smile. I would as lief
We two, we two, had never met!

To-day I am fourscore and ten—
I would not trust my eyes to-day;
But I, a clear-eyed twenty then,
Could spy a net berth miles away.

By all the gods of heaven and sea,
I saw this maid, and could have kissed
Her hair that streamed across my knee,
Had she not eddied off like mist.

By all the gods of sea and heaven
I swore that I would overtake
This sea maid; down for fully seven
Fathoms I followed in her wake.

Dimmer and dimmer shone her curls;
With burning eyes and pounding heart
I rose alone. From island girls
It has not hurt since then to part.

Richard Butler Glaeser

A Stranger in Suburbia

A DAUGHTER OF THE PELHAMS DECIDES THAT SHE CAN DO
MUCH TO ENLIGHTEN THE SOCIAL DARKNESS
OF RIDGEMERE

By Larry Barretto

WHEN Cynthia Pelham came to Ridgemere, it caused a sensation. Cynthia was well advertised in advance of her arrival, and from the first she was something of a celebrity. There was reason for this. She had pretensions to both family and culture—pretensions that were founded on fact.

Her aunt on her mother's side had married Lord Glendougal—pronounced "Glendale"—an Irish peer, and had lived with him in an inaccessible part of County Kerry. This lady's father had been a Hodgkins of Cincinnati, who had been expected to leave a great deal of money, acquired by his invention of an excellent and popular washing machine. Unfortunately, just when the family fortunes were at their crest, some one invented a still better machine; and when the old man's will was opened, his widow found that she had hardly enough to bless herself with, not to speak of sharing her pittance with her married daughters.

The eldest daughter was already Lady Glendougal, and had a marriage license attesting that fact safely tucked away; but the effect on her lord was disastrous. He had never cared much for women, anyway—or, rather, he had cared too much for too many of them; and to be burdened with a wife without a fortune rather cramped his style—an American wife, too!

They had retired to the ancestral halls in Kerry, where in time he became almost reconciled to his hard lot, although he always held his wife in contemptuous disregard. He had been known to swear at her frightfully in the Irish language, which, it was said, he had learned for that purpose. She, poor lady, never knew what he was

saying, as his lordship's compliments and curses were delivered in just the same manner.

There was, however, the castle. The left wing was uninhabitable, the right wing was unfurnished, the dry moat was used as a market garden, and the courtyard housed a litter of pigs; but it was a castle, for all that. The guidebooks said so. Every crumbling stone of the historic edifice had seen acts of bloodshed and violence, and an unpleasant ghost, who whistled through his teeth, walked at night for the benefit of favored guests. All this was disagreeable but inspiring, and people who had visited Glendougal Castle were assured of a dinner topic for years to come.

Cynthia had visited the place. She spent a year with her aunt, who about that time had visions of moral support from an American relative. She would have stayed longer, had it not been deemed advisable to curtail her visit. Family ties meant nothing to the earl, who even at sixty-five was violently flirtatious; and when he awoke to the fact that his niece by marriage was pretty, her aunt felt that the end had come. The blood of kings flowed in his veins, and he did not consider himself responsible for either his roving eye or his questionable acts.

In that year Cynthia learned a good deal. She learned about hunters—for the stables, at least, were kept in repair—hunting dogs, and hunt breakfasts. Also she learned how to handle discreetly young men in pink coats who had drunk too much Irish whisky, and old men in sack coats who did not need whisky to make them amorous.

She learned, further, the distinctions between aristocrats, peasants, and the middle

classes. Aristocrats were your own sort, whose birth condoned their bad manners. Peasants were good people, whom you treated kindly but firmly after having ridden through their fields. The middle classes were never mentioned without a shudder. They were vulgar and pushing, and usually they had enough money to give their push some force. To suppress them was an obvious duty.

Finally Cynthia learned never to mention the Hodgkins ancestry. This, however, had already been impressed upon her by Clarence Pelham, her father, a gentleman whose most important work in life had been explaining how his people had come over with such an ordinary crew as the *Mayflower* crowd.

When Cynthia left Ireland, her aunt said thoughtfully that she guessed she would do; and Cynthia thought so herself.

That was her family background. Cynthia admitted that God had a good deal to do with it; but the culture was her own. She was witty—a prime minister had said so. Her portrait had been painted twice by Farquharson, who usually found beauty only in wealthy dowagers. She had exchanged bantering remarks with Breda, the famous writer, and it was said that she had been the inspiration of a lyric by Llantony, the Welsh poet. Furthermore, she had been presented at court, and knew whether an ambassadress took precedence over a countess.

In spite of all this, she failed to make the marriage her father had hoped for her. After two seasons in London they returned to America, where, soon afterward, he followed her mother to the grave—dying of disappointment, he said.

The Pelham finances were in a bad way, and Cynthia took to visiting. There was nothing else to do. She visited in all the fine houses to which she had an entrée. She stayed so long, and dressed herself so well on her bridge winnings, that at last she wore out her welcome. It was rather hard to meet delicately phrased hints with a bland, unconscious smile, especially when you had the reputation of being subtle; and the girl grew frightened.

She wrote to her aunt in Ireland, suggesting that she should go back there for an indefinite time. Lady Glendougal replied that it would be inadvisable. The earl, it seemed, was in for an attack of gout, which always made him bad-tempered, and

his heart was no better than it had been—which did not at all refer to a physical lesion, for that organ was perfectly healthy. In a postscript the writer frankly advised Cynthia to stay away until she was either safely married or an old maid.

There remained nothing but Ridgemere, and Cynthia contemplated it with growing horror. Another aunt lived there, also a Hodgkins, who—worse yet!—had married a Grindle, a person who dealt in shoes. He was reputed to be wealthy, but of this Cynthia had no direct knowledge. For years there had been no interchange with this branch of the family.

Ridgemere was a suburb, and suburbs denoted middle classes. Cynthia pictured the future with disgust. For a time she contemplated suicide, but she was young, and it was hard to die. She was also harried by bills with threatening letters attached; so at last she took out a sheet of paper with the Pelham crest, very small, in black at the top, and wrote to her suburban aunt.

It was not a very gracious letter, but Cynthia was in no way surprised when a cordial reply came, inviting her to spend the summer. They would be delighted; it was time they knew their niece; their house was hers. Cynthia wished their bank account was also hers, and resolutely set to work packing her trunks. She had discarded her maid eight months before.

II

MRS. GRINDLE met her at the station. There were quite a number of people on the train, but her aunt recognized the girl instantly.

"My dear, I would have known you anywhere!" she exclaimed, and kissed the girl heartily.

Cynthia submitted to the embrace, and smiled slightly. Why shouldn't she be recognized? It was evident that her aunt knew breeding when she saw it, and there was no one else on the train who gave such marked evidence of it as Cynthia. With this start, her summer promised to be an easy one.

"You look exactly like a Hodgkins—eyes, nose, and hair," the unfortunate woman continued. Cynthia froze. "I'd have recognized you in China!"

Eyes, nose, and hair were all right—sea-green and fringed with dark lashes; small and slightly retroussé; burnished copper

which had lost the caroty red that still persisted in Mrs. Grindle's head—but to tell Cynthia that they were a heritage from the Hodgkinsses was too much. She felt that the physical qualities might be the same, but that they had been refined by the blood of the Pelhams.

She permitted herself to be led to the waiting automobile without speaking. Here another shock awaited her. A casual young chauffeur looked at her with bold-eyed admiration, and said to Mrs. Grindle, out of the corner of his mouth:

"Gimme the young lady's checks, an' I'll rustle the trunks out o' the baggage room."

Cynthia waited in haughty surprise for the terrible rebuke that he would surely receive, but none came.

"My dear, give Jimmy the checks for your things," her aunt said mildly.

Cynthia was forced to open her bag and hand them to the chauffeur with flushing cheeks.

"Madam, if you will allow me to have the checks, I will arrange for the luggage. Thank you, ma'am," would have been the correct formula, accompanied by that deferential bend of the shoulders which it takes seven generations to drill properly into servants; but then what could you expect in a place called Ridgemere?

On their arrival at the house Cynthia retired to her room, pleading that she had letters to write. One always wrote letters, in polite circles, when one wished to be alone. In reality, when the door closed behind her, she flung herself on the bed and burst into tears.

It may be odd, but Cynthia, although she did not show it, was really more frightened than if she had been set down on a cannibal island. Her surroundings were just as strange to her. It was terrible to find yourself suddenly in a milieu you had been taught to despise, to have lost a good-looking and beloved father who, whatever his faults, had always been the soul of polite courtesy, and to have in the bank the sum of one thousand and ninety dollars, with no apparent means of getting more, and with a lifetime to be lived through. None of the Pelhams died young, and Cynthia had no hope of ending a miserable existence early, except by violence.

She wished heartily that she had accepted the honest proposals of Sir John Greville, or even the dishonest ones of old Lord

Philipsbrooke; but it was too late for that now. Presently, because she really was a sport, she washed her eyes in cold water and went down to dinner.

"I'll carry through somehow," she told herself, and no soldier ever felt more valiant in a forlorn hope.

Ridgemere was a pretty place. Even Cynthia had to admit it, with reservations. The dwellings were large and comfortable, and the plumbing was much better than in Glendougal Castle, where the single tin bathtub was likely to spring a leak at the most inconvenient moment, leaving its occupant stranded and shivering; but the houses were too close together, and she missed the expanse of green lawns and parks.

At Blythe, Sir John's country seat, deer wandered beneath the trees, their dappled sides showing in the shadowed sunlight. Here, in the big Foster place on the hill, an iron deer stood guard. Cynthia felt that at best it was a pretty poor imitation. In fact, all Ridgemere seemed to be more or less an imitation. The people were kindly enough, doubtless they meant well, and, as far as externals went, they resembled the people in the great world she had lived in. They overdid it, however. They were too well dressed. Some of the women made yearly trips to Paris for clothes; but they had to, of course, being what they were. Old Lady Melton's hair was always coming down, and her shirt waists, built in the style of 1890, never seemed quite to make the grade of her skirt band; but then she had been born a Percy.

There were no Percys in Ridgemere—no, indeed! Everybody there was in trade, and every morning the men left for their shops or offices in the city. In the evening handsome cars met them, and they were whirled off to the country club, the yacht club, or the golf links. They worked hard, but when their day's work was done it was a pleasant enough life, and they showed it. Their faces, shaven to the blood, were ruddy and healthy, and the older men tended to embonpoint.

They brought their business into their homes, and no one felt the disgrace of it. Walter Grindle was a case in point. The first evening he talked frankly, even boastfully, of his shoe stores.

"It's too bad poor Clarence didn't get into something of the sort thirty years ago," he said to his niece by marriage. "You'd

be better off now. I understand he didn't leave much."

"But my father would never have deigned—" began Cynthia haughtily, and stopped.

She was still dangerously near to tears. Because she had promised herself to carry through, she made a pretense of choking.

Her aunt was blessed with intuition, but not enough.

"Well, well," Mrs. Grindle said comfortingly, "we can't all hope to make a success in life, and I'm sure Clarence did the best he could. You shouldn't blame him, Walter."

Her husband was a kindly man, and made haste to cover his error.

"I don't," he answered hastily. "Far from it. It doesn't make any difference, anyway. Cynthia is such a pretty girl that we'll marry her off in no time. There are quite a lot of eligible young men about Ridgemere, and when once they see her they'll wear a path to this house. You'll see!"

He winked benevolently at his niece, who was speechless with rage. She was not accustomed to having her attractive person offered about in this manner.

Mrs. Grindle took up the suggestion with real pleasure. They had done very little entertaining since their only daughter was married, and she liked to have young people about. The remainder of the dinner was spent in a discussion of plans for much gayety.

Cynthia sat in silence between these impossible relatives, and every time they mentioned a man's name she stiffened. She would, she supposed, have to take part in some of the functions they were planning, but she would be as distant as possible; and as for considering marriage with any of these clods—never!

The thought was so distressing that she had to retire soon after dinner to write more letters, and in the morning her correspondence was still uncompleted. A chance remark of her uncle crowned her misery.

"She doesn't seem very sociable, but I suppose she still feels shy and awkward," he told his wife.

"I understand she was a great success in London," replied Mrs. Grindle dubiously. "We'll give her a chance. She's certainly pretty."

A Pelham shy and awkward! It was incredible! Cynthia packed her trunks, and

promptly unpacked them again. She had, she realized, no other place to go.

III

RIDGEMERE came to judge, and, instead, was judged. Cynthia found its people wanting, one and all. Even when they were socially correct, as most of them were, she knew that it was only a veneer, and beneath it she discerned vulgarity—or, at any rate, she thought she did. Under the circumstances it must be there. She had been taught so all her life.

The women would have liked her had she let them, but they found her unapproachable. This, they imagined, was due to her manner, which was as coldly English as her accent; but she soon undid them.

Cynthia had been particularly rude to little Mrs. Lake, who made every new woman she met her confidante, and who could whisper secrets by the hour. She had finished at last with her husband, her children, her house, and her neighbors. Never had she had such an attentive listener as Cynthia Pelham, who sat in utter silence, with her eyes on the distant ocean.

Mrs. Lake gratefully gave her the opportunity for which she must be waiting.

"And now, Miss Pelham, do tell me what you really think of Ridgemere. We are so eager to know!" she said, all in a breath.

Cynthia looked at her with curious sea-green eyes. She had had a bad morning. A New York firm of dressmakers was threatening to sue her, which was disturbing. A letter from her Irish aunt told her that Lord Glendougal was having a scandalous affair with a kitchen maid, and that they were vainly endeavoring to put another mortgage on the castle. It made her realize the glories she was missing.

"Are you really?" she asked insolently. Mrs. Lake signified that she was.

"Well," said Cynthia deliberately, "I love your kids, and I love cars, and I love your cooks, but you bore me."

It was frightfully rude, of course, and later Cynthia felt sorry for it. After all, she had been hard pressed.

Of course, the story made the rounds, and the women were inclined to avoid her. No one exactly wanted to lay herself open to insult. Cynthia was still asked to the larger parties, for the sake of her aunt and uncle, but they realized that she would never make any real friend.

The men felt differently about it. They would stand a good deal from such a pretty girl, especially one who played golf and tennis so well, and danced so lightly.

Cynthia had her softer moments, too—one cannot be consistently disagreeable at twenty-two—and she got on rather well with the men, when they were not sentimental. The trouble was that they all were sentimental sooner or later, one after another, and had to be shown their places. It took all the Pelham blood and the Glendougal upbringing to do it, in some cases; but Cynthia succeeded, except with one young man, by name Richard Smith.

Young Smith had everything in his favor except his name. He was big and blond and good-looking. His eyes were an honest blue, with a twinkle in them. He was strong, with heroic muscles. His manners were perfect, and he had a sense of humor.

Because Cynthia could not think of anything else to say when her aunt timidly suggested him as a possible suitor—she was taking her niece's case very much to heart—the girl scornfully remarked that he looked like one of the life-savers on the beach. As a matter of fact, he had served as a life-saver during the summer of his sophomore year; but Mrs. Grindle could not see why this should counterbalance all his excellent qualities. She said so, and mentioned that he was sure to be rich some day. He was already doing very well in his father's business.

Cynthia flamed anew. Her situation was so desperate now that any attempt to help her was like rubbing salt in an open wound. She promised herself that her retaliation would be terrible, should Mr. Richard Smith show signs of becoming ardent.

He did, of course, after about six weeks, but in a very peculiar manner.

From a distance he had observed the defeat of various male friends. When his own heart began to be stirred with uneasy murmurings, and he woke each morning from dreams of girls whose hair was like burnished copper, he knew that he, too, had been elected, and he set about planning a campaign that should be successful. He was a determined young man, in spite of his good nature, and he did not figure on losing anything on which he had set his mind.

He had noticed that tender devotion, abject humility, and loverlike despair had all gone by the board with those who had previously entered the lists, so he decided to

deride everything that this strange and lovely girl held most sacred. He had vision enough to see that she would have to undergo a radical change of heart, if the rest of her life was to be spent in Ridgemere as Mrs. Richard Smith, Jr. Temperament was all right when it was trained and cultivated, but he couldn't quite see it growing wild all over the ancestral halls—which were now almost eight years old.

His opening gun was effective. Cynthia and he found themselves next to each other at dinner. Richard had arranged this. His hostess was a good friend who indulged his whims, even though she could not understand why he wished to be placed next to that difficult girl, who could congeal any party.

"Hello, Cynthia!" he said cheerfully. "I haven't seen you for an age. Where have you been keeping yourself?"

Cynthia blanched. Even the artificial pearls at her throat lost color. She stiffened so much that her backbone felt as if it had been converted into Bessemer steel. This was rough stuff, but after the first gasp she rallied and met it with rougher.

"Miss Pelham, please," she answered in a low voice. "I cannot remember giving you permission to—"

"Nonsense!" he broke in. "I can't call you that. There's a reason."

Smith set his lips stubbornly.

"I might at least be permitted to hear the reason," she said at last, angry curiosity winning.

"I don't like to mention family skeletons, but one of your relatives was a murderer," he told her. "I can't bear to think of your having the same name."

"A murderer?"

"Yes—back in 1580 a Pelham murdered his wife, who was Lady Audrey Dysart. I looked it all up. Never mind, I'll help you keep it dark!"

Either this ignorant yokel was jesting with her, or else he did not realize that after four hundred years a murder became an interesting family tradition. The tragedy of Lady Audrey was one of the best traditions in the annals of the Pelhams.

Cynthia refused the dish at her elbow while she tried to think up an adequate retort, but none occurred to her.

"In spite of your solicitude, I must insist on being called Miss Pelham," she said at last, icily.

Young Smith shook his head.

"Never again!" he said firmly, and Cynthia knew that he meant it. "If you don't like Cynthia, I'll call you Cyn. How about that?"

A small panic invaded the girl. If her aunt heard this man pronouncing that disgusting diminutive, she would consider it tantamount to an engagement. The whole town would be agog. Cynthia felt perfectly helpless. Never before had she had to cope with a situation like this.

"Your breeding is execrable," she told him bluntly; "but if you have to address me at all, I prefer Cynthia to—to that—"

She turned away from him, and resolutely engaged the astonished man on her right in a rapid-fire conversation that lasted through half the dinner. Richard Smith looked as happy as if she had promised him her hand, although the flame of fury in her eyes had cut deep. He had to fortify his weakening resolution.

After a time she was obliged to address herself to him again. It would not do to sit in utter silence. Already curious eyes were turned toward them. The young man seized the opportunity with avidity.

"Why have you never been in Ridgemere before?" he demanded. "You don't know what you've missed!"

Cynthia did not want to know.

"Much of my life has been spent in Ireland, with my uncle and aunt," she said hurriedly, to avoid a description of suburban pleasures.

Now this statement was not strictly accurate. To be exact, just one of her twenty-two years had been spent in Ireland; but Cynthia was a woman, and could be forgiven overstatements. Besides, she was badly flustered.

Richard smiled and showed all his white teeth.

"What does your uncle do?"

"Do?" Cynthia was horrified. Did this person imagine that her titled uncle was in trade? "My uncle is Lord Glendougal," she said. She wished she could add that he managed his estate, but there was no estate. "He rides to hounds," she concluded.

The young man leaned forward, as if they were exchanging confidences.

"Well, if you don't pay a little more attention to me, I may be going to the dogs myself," he whispered.

The girl looked at her hostess, praying that she would give the signal to rise.

"Don't you want to know what I do?" continued Smith.

"Since we have to talk, I suppose you might as well tell me."

"I deal in hides," he said, and looked at her expectantly.

Cynthia did not pursue the subject further. She feared bloody details, although there was little danger of them in the manufacture of leather goods.

Immediately after dinner she excused herself to her hostess and ordered the Grindal car. Richard saw her into it. He was immaculate in his evening clothes, and Cynthia was aware of it. She hated herself for noticing these trivial details.

"Will you play golf with me to-morrow, Cynthia?" he asked.

"No, I will not!" she snapped, and slammed the door of the car.

That night she dreamed of blond beasts who pursued her through frightful forests and caught her in a net of outrageous questions. They all had the face of Richard Smith.

IV

THE courting of Cynthia Pelham soon gained the attention of all Ridgemere. Richard was so conspicuous in his curious devotion that one must have been myopic not to see it.

The day after the unfortunate dinner he sent her orchids. Cynthia promptly returned them, but Richard was in no way abashed. She could not appear in public without his joining her. He talked outrageously, while his manner was the mirror of courtesy. The worst snubbing could not squelch him.

Cynthia found words passing her lips that she could not believe possible. She thought seriously of leaving Ridgemere. Only a dwindling bank account and a growing fear of actual want kept her there.

There was a certain fascination about it, however. Her nights were spent in nervous terror as to what Richard would do the next day. If, as sometimes happened, he ignored her, the day seemed flat and dreary in consequence. She was grateful for the respite, she told herself, but she only thought of him the more. He had entirely captured her imagination.

She lived in fear of opening the morning paper and finding their engagement announced, for she felt that Richard was fully capable of that.

She had put on a filmy white frock and an appealing expression as part of her campaign, and had permitted him to find her alone and defenseless in a hammock in a secluded part of the Grindle piazza. Cynthia was not without resources. The stars were bright that evening. The odor of honeysuckle filled the air with poignant sweetness. The light from an open window shone in a pale glow on the oval of her face, marking the wistful droop of her mouth and the sadness of her wide eyes. She was a child, frightened and pressed too hard.

Richard dropped into the chair beside her, and something caught at his breath. She was too lovely!

"Dick," she said softly, "why are you so horrible to me? It's—it's cruel! Every one is talking."

There was a hint of tears in her voice. It was the first time she had called him by his familiar name. His knees turned to water, the night took on a great glory, and he trembled as if it were cold. He leaned forward and touched her hand.

"My dear!" he whispered. "My dear, it's only because I love you so! I had to do something to make you notice me. Cyn, if you'll just say the word—just say—"

He was becoming inarticulate. He was no longer the masterful young man of ready impertinences.

Cynthia's heart was beating faster. In fact, it was hammering furiously. She imagined it was because fate had delivered him into her hands.

"But the hides!" she said faintly, referring to his business. "I think hides—"

"I can explain all that," he began eagerly.

"You needn't!" she interrupted, and swung herself out of the hammock. "I wouldn't marry you if you were the last man on earth!"

There was the concentrated essence of scorn in her voice. She walked toward the door.

This statement of Cynthia's was not original. It was hardly worthy of a girl who had exchanged repartee with Breade. Other women in other days had said the selfsame words; but the effect on Richard was satisfying. He sat so quietly, his head in his hands, that she ventured to peep at him over her shoulder. He reached her at the door, and held it open for her. His face was white in spite of its tan, and his eyes were no longer pleasant.

"You little vixen! I'll marry you if it takes a lifetime!" he whispered, and permitted her to pass.

The war was on again.

Two days later he strolled into the writing room of the country club, where she sat scribbling, and addressed her as easily as if nothing had happened.

"Hello, Cynthia!" he said. "Will you play with me in the mixed doubles tournament this afternoon?"

"Certainly not!" she answered, and moved her chair slightly, so that he might have a more direct view of her back.

The piece of paper by her elbow fluttered to the floor, and she made a desperate grab for it. Richard stooped and picked it up for her.

"Well, you might just as well," he told her. "I've put our names down for it. Hello, what's this?"

He was staring at the paper in his hand.

"Give it to me!" she cried furiously.

"I will," he said, and handed it back, with a curious expression on his face.

On the sheet was scribbled:

Cynthia Smith—Cynthia P. Smith—Cynthia Pelham Smith—Mrs. Richard Smith, Jr.

"How dared you read it?" she whispered, her cheeks flaming.

"I couldn't help it," he protested, his face as red as her own.

"It—it was my subconscious mind, I suppose. I didn't know what I was doing," she declared.

Before his quizzical expression she burst into tears and ran from the room.

Richard Smith liked to play tennis. He was almost in the star class; but this afternoon he defaulted without a qualm. He felt that he was a champion, anyhow, and the cup that he had lost had been replaced by a better prize.

Cynthia spent the afternoon lying on her bed, with a handkerchief soaked in cologne pressed to her aching head.

"Never! Never!" she whispered.

She tried to recall the feudal glories of Glendougal Castle; but suddenly it seemed like a very unsanitary old place.

V

THE battle between Cynthia and Richard might have continued until they both expired from old age had it not been for the Hon. Aubrey Penthaven.

Then Hon. Aubrey showed up at a most

opportune time for Cynthia. He was visiting Mrs. Alan Foster, who owned the big place on the hill, and who occasionally took a flyer in the social life of Bar Harbor. She had met him there, and had induced him to come to Ridgemere. It promised to be a big season for Ridgemere.

Mr. Penthaven was fresh from England, but not so fresh that he did not know exactly what he wanted. What he wanted most was an heiress — one whose fortune ran up well into six figures. He had to offer in exchange a well groomed air, an engaging drawl, and manners which, when he elected, could be flawless.

He had a way with women that had about it an appealing flavor of old-world courtesy. He looked and acted as if they were too far removed from this vulgar sphere to have their fragility treated with anything but exquisite deference. It was the things he left unsaid that really counted.

In his earlier years he had been in love with a nice, fresh-cheeked English girl; but the ending of the war had not brought the millennium for which he had hoped, and they had parted with tears and mutual promises. You can't live on nothing a year, even if you are the second son of a peer and have taken honors at Oxford, and Aubrey knew it.

His father, Lord Sunwick, knew it, too. He had been a notorious reprobate in his day, and had squandered his patrimony; but he had force and decision enough to try to recoup the family fortunes by sending his second son to America, to find a rich wife.

Aubrey had departed reluctantly. He believed in taking life easily, and he was moderately sure that he would never be in love again; but his father was a rather terrible old man who enforced obedience. Aubrey's own youth had been wild, to put it mildly, until he met that pleasant-faced girl; but America was not supposed to take cognizance of little things like that.

America did, however. At any rate, the scion of aristocracy did not find it quite as smooth sailing as he had expected. Heiresses were not exactly hanging around waiting to be asked, and he had to revise his estimate of the native intelligence several times. Hence his appearance in Ridgemere. In simpler surroundings he felt that he might do better.

When he met Cynthia, he could hardly believe his luck. She was easy to look at,

and an orphan, too. That meant that there would be no tiresome waiting around until an inconvenient father went to his rest. There could be no doubt as to her wealth. Her uncle was rich, and the pearls the girl wore were fabulous. They were always about her neck, and Aubrey had never seen such perfect color. As a matter of fact, they were excellent imitations.

The jewels in her rings were real. Aubrey knew something about precious stones, and he examined them one night, while telling her fortune. These were heirlooms, reset, relics of brighter Pelham days; but Aubrey did not know that. Her clothes were exquisite, and the reason thereof was known only to Cynthia. The first night they met he saw her drop a hundred dollars at bridge with only the faintest smile of indifference on her lips, although death was in her heart. The Hon. Aubrey Penthaven felt that he had come home after a long voyage.

Cynthia liked him from the start. She had met enough English gentlemen to be able to distinguish the real from the spurious, and it was evident that Aubrey belonged to the former class. His shadowy smile and wistful eyes attracted her. The gentleness of his manner was a relief after the outrageous conduct of Richard Smith — or so she told herself.

She and Aubrey had friends in common, and spoke the same language. He had a happy gift of mimicry, and could show up the weaknesses of those about him to perfection. He could talk about hunting.

He made Richard jealous. When Cynthia made this delightful discovery, her course was set. At last she had found a way to free herself from Smith's obnoxious attentions. Her pride had been hurt. Richard had caught her in a silly game, which in itself meant nothing, although he was bound to give it significance. She felt humiliated, cheapened, at what he must think of her.

Aubrey came as a godsend. She invested him with all sorts of virtues that he did not possess; and, because she was really homesick, she developed a genuine affection for him. It might easily lead to marriage, and Ridgemere thought it would. Evidently Richard's day was past before it had even dawned.

"Why do you go around with that bounder?" he demanded, after three weeks of it.

Now this discourteous expression was far from being justified, but Richard had suffered. He had developed mental pains which held him in utter torment.

"Bounder?"

Cynthia raised her eyebrows. They said as plainly as words that Mr. Richard Smith was hardly a judge, in her opinion.

"Yes—he's unspeakable. I don't like to see you wasting your time on such trash!"

"Really?" she said. "I find him a charming gentleman."

"He wants to marry you!"

"Is that why he's a bounder?" she asked. "Your manners grow worse, Mr. Smith."

"Doesn't he?"

"He hasn't asked me—yet," Cynthia said in a low voice.

She had learned to coquette in a severe school.

"Do you care for him?" asked Richard, and felt as if knives were tearing at his vitals.

Naturally she did not answer.

"Very well!" he said, after a pause. "I'm through! If you can see anything in that fellow, I don't believe you're the girl I thought you were. I'm through!" he repeated decisively.

Cynthia applauded him gently.

"I'm glad you've learned your lesson at last," she remarked idly, and strolled off to the group about the tea table.

Thereafter Richard stayed on the outside of things and glowered

VI

THE culmination of the season was to be a fancy dress ball. It was an annual affair, held at the country club, and noted for its gayety. People drove in for it from miles around.

There were the usual dim piazzas hung with colored lanterns that swayed in the breeze, the dancing floor that was too slippery, and the refreshment table, behind which a white-uniformed attendant served glasses of an innocuous liquid from bowls in which floated lumps of orange ice. There was one of the best jazz bands that money could provide. On the smooth lawn that stretched away toward the golf links were shadowy trees, and beneath them chairs were placed. It was not necessary to stay in the noisy rooms, where toy rattles whirred and bright balloons bobbed overhead.

There was a great deal of secrecy about the choice of costumes. For weeks the younger element had been making plans. To have one's disguise penetrated before the hour of unmasking was regarded as a serious discredit.

Aubrey Penthaven had consulted Cynthia about it. He had made no arrangements as to what he should wear, and he was not inclined to have anything sent out from the city. There was the question of expense, and even in so slight a matter as this he felt the need of caution. The summer was drifting past, and his funds were running low—so low that he was genuinely alarmed.

Lord Sunwick had not overburdened his son with money. Indeed, he had probably felt that so unworthy a campaign as the quest of an American heiress did not require a great deal of it; but Aubrey had not yet brought home the bacon—or the steel mills, or whatever the golden treasure was to consist of. That very morning he had received an angry letter demanding to know what the devil he was about, and why the devil he wasn't about it. In consequence, he was deeply depressed.

A dozen young men whom he knew—he named them bitterly—would make better fortune hunters than he had. They would have pulled it off successfully by now. What the deuce was the matter with him? Here was Cynthia, a charming girl with a decent accent and even a nice English name, who was obviously interested in him. Here were those lovely pearls, and yet—

The letter from Lord Sunwick crackled ominously in Aubrey's pocket. The night of the dance would be the night, he assured himself.

Cynthia had comforted him about the costume.

"It doesn't in the least matter whether you hire one, if it's a nuisance," she told him. "I understand a costumer will come out from the city with a lot of dominoes and things. Half the men don't bother to plan what they will wear. It's only the women and the boys who go to the trouble. I wouldn't myself, if it weren't for my aunt. You will find something in the men's dressing room. It's all a great bore, anyway, and I wish I weren't going!"

Cynthia was not too happy herself. For two weeks Richard Smith had ignored her completely, and she had begun to believe

he intended to do so permanently. His "I'm through" had sounded definite, and she was beginning to realize that he meant what he said. It was a relief, of course, but she was feeling the boredom that comes after hard-won battle. Her nerves could not relax after the excursions and alarms.

Outwardly she was more than ever contemptuous of Richard, who had been paying ardent court to a dumpy girl named Eleanor Strang. Eleanor did not even have absolute ugliness to commend her, but was just nondescript. Cynthia pronounced the word with a certain satisfaction. She remembered with some amusement his passionate declarations to herself only a month ago. To drop from a Pelham to that! But what else could you expect of a Smith—in Suburbia?

"I say, Cynthia!" Aubrey broke in. "You'll be sure to show up, won't you? I don't think I could stick it alone, without you there."

There was a wistful appeal in his eyes. Cynthia was touched. They were strangers together in a foreign land.

"Buck up, old boy," she told him with easy familiarity. "I'll make it, all right, and probably we can spend most of the evening together."

He nodded in gentle appreciation. Cynthia had known men who would have turned white with happiness at the words, but Aubrey was not that sort. He took life easily. She admired the perfect restraint of his breeding.

"How shall we know each other?" he asked doubtfully.

All Americans were efficient; let her arrange it. He told himself that she would make a charming hostess in Sunwick Hall.

The girl considered.

"Wear a red domino. There is sure to be one. Wait! In case there should be more than one in the ballroom, you can pin this on your arm. Here!" She handed him her handkerchief—a tiny square of linen and lace. "I'll be sure to know you, then. I'll have on a shepherdess costume. It's a silly business! Watch out for me, Aubrey."

Aubrey Penthaven bent low and raised her hand to his lips.

"I should know you in any disguise," he assured her with weary gallantry.

On the night of the dance, Aubrey strolled into the men's dressing room at the

country club, and looked about. There was an array of colored suits ready to put on—green, blue, white, red, and particolored, with masks for each. Aubrey pulled out a red one and fingered it doubtfully. It was a hot night, and the garment felt heavy. The party had hardly begun yet. He could hear the orchestra just tuning up, and the shrill laughter of a group of boys and girls who had arrived early.

With a sigh he took the little handkerchief from his pocket and pinned it to the sleeve. There would be time for another cigarette, and he had a difficult campaign to plan. To-night must be the night!

Abstractedly he wandered out under the trees.

Richard Smith had not intended to come to this dance. Indeed, nothing was farther from his mind. All his gayety, all his impertinence, all the confidence that had carried him along since he first met Cynthia, had left him. He had been wounded, and he was willing to admit that his hurt was mortal. He had been considering throwing up his job and hiding himself in the jungles of Africa, where he might hunt lions or elephants. He was filled with the overwhelming desire to injure something.

There wasn't any doubt in his mind that Cynthia was going to marry Penthaven. The man wasn't such a bad sort either, Smith told himself in a moment of honesty. Probably he would make her happy—happier than Richard could. She wasn't cut out for Ridgemere—you could see that. What she needed was background. He spent a good deal of valuable time wondering if it were possible to obtain that in less than three generations.

No, he was not going to the country club. She would be there dancing with that "bully ass," he said, using the ass's own words. You did not exactly put yourself in the way of trouble—not if your brains were in good working order.

It was therefore with a somewhat shamed surprise that Richard found himself parking his car among the others in the oval, and making his way to the dressing room. He would look in—yes, just for a minute. A convenient red domino lay before him. He slipped it on, and adjusted the mask beneath the hood.

The Hon. Aubrey Penthaven still lingered beneath the trees, planning the most effective means of making his sacrificial speech.

The room was filled with kings and shepherds, harlequins and their partners, coo-lies, pirates, and goddesses, whirling about, swaying to the music that enveloped them in pulsating waves. A pulse of excitement began to beat in Richard's throat. The merry scene was filled for a moment with poignant tenseness.

Near the door a shepherdess, who waved would-be partners impatiently away, regarded him intently. Her disguise was thoroughly inadequate. A tiny black mask just covered the bridge of her nose, and tendrils of burnished hair, escaping from her headdress, lay upon her neck. Cynthia had decided to marry the Hon. Aubrey Penthaven. He was a nice boy. He had a courtesy title, and a home of true culture in England was preferable to her present wretched condition. The hour had struck, and her decision had been made. It was no longer possible to postpone her fate.

With unwilling steps Richard drew near her. They were side by side. Her eyes traveled up the shapeless costume, rested at the sleeve, and went to his face. There was an unmistakable gleam of recognition in the slits of the mask.

"I thought you were never coming!" she said in a low voice and leaned toward him.

Sheer surprise kept the man dumb. He had not intended to speak, fearing the customary rebuff, and now he could not. Silently he offered her his arm, to dance.

"Please—I'd rather not," she whispered. "Let us go out where it is dark and cool."

Richard did not believe in miracles, but he had a sincere faith in the unexpected. Now he played his luck to the utmost. This soft mood of Cynthia's might not last.

They moved toward a French window. Suddenly a circle of buffoons, with hands clasped, formed and began dancing around them in wild gyrations, drawing closer, impeding their progress, and pressing them together. A clumsy man, bounding forward, stepped on Cynthia's satin slipper. She shrank back against Richard with a cry of pain.

At the sound, some wire of restraint snapped in him. The thin veneer of civilization vanished, and for a moment he was a primitive man again, fighting for the woman he loved. With a sweep he gathered Cynthia into his arms, and thrust a powerful and aggressive shoulder against the line of assailants. It broke before him. He and Cynthia were free and out of doors,

followed by a murmur of dismay at his roughness.

The girl lay against his breast. He had literally lifted her from her feet, and her arms clung about his shoulders for support. Richard was still in a prehistoric period. No caveman could have acted with more decision. He held her so tightly that she gasped, her slight mask fell away, and he was covering her face with kisses. It was unimportant that his mouth was full of the calico of his own mask—he did not even know it. He was a starving man seeking satiation.

Something snapped at Cynthia's throat, and there was a tinkle of falling beads on the floor. She struggled for a moment, and lay still. A delicious warmth was creeping over her. All effort was futile. So this was love!

"Why, Aubrey!" she murmured.

The arms tightened, then relaxed. The man gave a little cry like that of a trapped animal—a moan of pain. As suddenly as he had come, he thrust her aside and was gone.

The railing of the piazza hurt her as she staggered against it. Cynthia was bewildered. In the distance a couple were walking arm in arm. So that was the reason! Aubrey was such a funny, shy boy, but with such unexpected depths of passion. Who would have believed it? She waited, happy in the expectation of his return.

A figure in a red domino, searching wildly, appeared at the French window. It was Aubrey, who had lingered too long over rehearsing his speech. When he saw the unmasked shepherdess, he breathed his relief and came forward.

Words of apology were on his lips, but, surprisingly, the shepherdess did not wait for them. She put her arms about his neck.

"Foolish boy!" she murmured. "No one can see us!"

Aubrey was astounded. By Jove, American girls were extraordinary! Here was this one offering herself without so much as a word being spoken! A bit thick, that!

Well, it made it easy for him. Collecting himself, he raised his mask.

"I hope you will do me the honor to become my wife," he said firmly. "Sunwick Hall will be happy to have such a lovely daughter."

Something else seemed to be necessary, so he bent over and kissed her chastely on

the forehead. Some small object crunched under his foot. Stooping, he picked it up.

Cynthia felt herself turning cold. A dreadful thing had happened—she could not tell what; but why was that unbridled passion replaced by this formal courtesy? She felt as if a snake had brushed her forehead.

Richard Smith appeared, his mask off, his blue eyes rather wild. He was still breathing heavily as he stopped before them.

"See here!" he said abruptly. "I just proposed to Miss Pelham, and after she accepted me she called me Aubrey. I don't know who the devil she thought I was, but I'm going to find out. I suppose you want to marry her, don't you?"

He glared at his rival.

Cynthia glanced at the tiny square of linen and lace pinned to his sleeve, and understood all.

"Proposed!" she gasped under her breath.

Aubrey Penthaven was white about the lips. He had just made an appalling discovery. The crushed pearl that he had picked up was undoubtedly false. He held the paste fragments in his fingers. The remnants of the necklace still hung about Cynthia's throat.

His mind could work quickly enough when he exercised it. Why, this girl had no money! A thousand inconsequential things that she had said now fitted into the damning evidence. He had been a fool not to realize it before. Better to return to his irate father without a wife at all than with a poor American in tow!

After all, Aubrey had good blood. He rose to heights of which he had never suspected himself capable.

"Certainly," he answered icily, and gave Richard back his look. "I did myself the honor to propose a minute ago."

"Good! We'll decide this thing here and now. I'm tired of this damned nonsense." The impetuous American turned to the girl. "Whom are you going to take?"

Rage was rising in Cynthia. This outrageous person treated her as if she were a piece of luggage. She would never tolerate it—never!

With closed eyes she moved away from them. The quiet of Sunwick against the blatancy of Suburbia—a title against the name of Smith—those cold caresses against that fiery passion! A shudder of revulsion shook her.

"You," she said faintly, and walked straight into the arms of Richard.

They were very gentle now, and over her was stealing a feeling of contentment.

Aubrey promptly offered his congratulations, wringing Richard's hand. It was very exciting, just like a play. Something was stirring within him. If he returned to England immediately, say by steerage, there would be enough money left to make a hurried trip to Sussex and then to have a week's honeymoon in Wales before he and that pleasant-faced girl came back to face the fury of his father, Lord Sunwick.

"Ivy!" he murmured abstractedly. "Ivy!"

Richard Smith was touched with belated compassion.

"I'm afraid he's taking it pretty hard, Cyn," he whispered, as they moved away.

Cynthia did not answer. She was contemplating her future life in Suburbia.

"I can do a lot for Ridgemere," she thought; "but I'll have to consult Dick first. He's so strong-minded!"

MY LADY'S PRAISE

WHEN in some public place
I hear the general voice
Speaking my lady's praise,
Softly do I rejoice,
And hide my happy face,
Lest it my heart betray;
But of each word they say
I keep the golden sum,
And, when the night has come,
To her I tell it over—
How all the world doth love her!

Oliver C. Moore

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THE ADVENTUROUS CAREER OF NAPHTALI J. HARKER, OF SOUTHERN OHIO, WHO HAD TOO MANY STRANGE IDEAS TO BE A GOOD FARMER

By Oma Almona Davies

THREE are some tribes of the human sort which have no vestige of the home-keeping instinct. The Sherarat of the inner desert of Syria are such. They spend their days upon their fleet horses or their lean camels. At night they burrow, wherever they happen to be, into the sand of the desert. If the wind blows, they peg over them a mat of goatskins thredded together with self-thongs.

Naphtali J. Harker was not a Sherarat of the Hamadan Desert. Instead, his tribe—the tribe of Harker—infests the rich bottom lands of southern Ohio. Moreover, no tribe on earth exceeds them in home-keeping proclivities. They are as indigenous to the fertile Ohio soil as buckeyes and soft coal and pawpaws.

For six days in the week they cultivate the Ohio soil, talk the Ohio soil, and eat the products of the Ohio soil. On the seventh day they don white shirts and black silks purchased in, from, by, and for southern Ohio, listen to fervent prayers in behalf of southern Ohio, and spend the remainder of the day discussing, with other roots and rootlets of the Harker tribe, the births, marriages, and deaths of southern Ohio.

Naphtali was the one demoralizing exception. He never rooted. The home instinct was left out of him as completely as if he had been born under a goatskin flap on the Hamadan Desert. In fact, if Naphtali had been a Sherarat, and had couched his lean length beside his tribesmen brothers under the Syrian stars, and the wind had struck up, it may be doubted if he would even have hoisted his goatskin. I think he would have burrowed deeper, and would have grinned as the gale shrieked through his red-brown elf locks.

Not that he was a wild, discontented youth, for he was extraordinarily frank and docile and amiable. It was simply that he did not look with Harker enthusiasm upon cows and pigs and potatoes and wheat. He did not care how much ham and bacon the sows farrowed, or how monumental the hayricks grew.

He dourly tolerated his schoolbooks until he went into "joggurfy." Into that branch of learning he went so deeply that for many hours of each day and evening only the top of his sleek mahogany-hued head could be discerned above the upcast book. Prodded by an inquisitive Harker into divulging the reason why, he dug the embarrassed toes of one foot into the heel of the other and guessed it was because it told about things he couldn't see.

Well, the inquisitive Harker couldn't see that, of course; nor could any of the Harkers see the reason for another of Naphtali's obsessions. Though preternaturally active, he would lie for hours at a time at a certain spot upon the river bank, gazing down at the water. He guessed he was wondering what was under it. He guessed he liked to see it going.

But he knew even then that he was not telling all the truth about the river. The spot where he lay was a certain cove above a whirlpool. Whatever he threw into that whirlpool was sucked down greedily, as by some strong living thing which wanted the particular objects that he, Naphtali Harker, had to give it; so he fed it bits of wood and glass and stone, and came to believe that it was building a palace under the water.

Sometimes, by straining his eyes far toward the middle of the river, he thought he saw spewed upward upon the current his

donation of the moment before. He believed, then, that the thing had no use for just that object; so he found something else for it, and something else, and something else, and usually he never saw again what he gave it.

It became a tremendously personal and intriguing enterprise, the building of that palace under the whirlpool in the cove. Of course, he couldn't tell the Harkers; for, although Father Harker and those six older brothers were primarily a serious sort, Naphtali early discovered that they were inclined to laugh at him and at what he deemed the important things of life. To be laughed at always chilled his backbone. Sometimes he had a notion, so intense that it was almost painful, that if his mother had stayed on earth she would never have laughed at him.

At the age of twelve Naphtali suddenly veered and touched the Harker norm. Between the ages of ten and eighteen all the Harkers got religion. At the age of twelve, then, in a protracted meeting led by an erstwhile missionary from Tibet, Naphtali got religion—or, at any rate, everybody, including himself, thought he got it. In reality he got ventriloquism.

The missionary was a Scotch-Irishman with eyes shaped and colored like Naphtali's own. They were not particularly large eyes, but they were wide and malachite blue, and they looked as if they would never take time to blink. In one respect their owner was a failure as a missionary, for he would not stay where he was put. He had been commissioned to the lowlands of China; within a year he had found himself on the highlands of Tibet. *En route* he learned the art of ventriloquism from a starving priest-magician whom he succored with swans' eggs out of his own skin bag.

Among the faithful in southern Ohio, lodged for the space of the revival at the home of old Foursquare Harker, Naphtali's father, the missionary taught the awestruck Naphtali the rudiments of that weird and ancient art—the narrowing of the glottis, the restriction of the lips, the retraction of the tongue. Naphtali, thus entertained beyond the limits of even his avid imagination, could do no less than oblige this miraculous creature by accepting his fervent invitation to the altar.

In fact, he embraced the life spiritual with such noisy intensity that the surprised

and gratified Harkers at once withdrew him from secular ranks, and in the fullness of time hustled him off to a denominational college in Pennsylvania. There, for three years, he practiced ventriloquism, developed a new forward pass in football, captured every prize for oratory, and steeped himself in geology. Just why geology he never knew, unless it was because, like geography, it dealt mostly with things that he couldn't see.

In his summer vacations, instead of decanting upon the Pentateuch and the Minor Prophets, he discomfited the Harkers by talking largely of shales, grits, and strata. He would tug and sweat in the fields—for a few days; then, suddenly, totally unconcerned by ripening wheat and scorching hay, off he would go, his nose uplifted, his eyes predatory, his lean legs harrying the county from one end to the other.

Upbraided, he was genuinely sorry. He would stand in his old childish attitude, digging the toes of one foot into the heel of the other, and say that it just seemed to him more important.

Toward the end of his vacation he told Foursquare that a vein of soft coal which opened its black mouth to the air halfway down the county slanted its tail under the southwest corner of the Harker farm. Now there never had been coal in that end of the county; so, obviously, there wasn't any coal there now. Old Foursquare spaded with his square, black beard and decided that he had spawned a moron. He also decided, being a logical man, that he would waste no more of his money on Naphtali's education.

In reality Father Harker's decision didn't matter much. War was declared about that time, and Naphtali was unbelievably stubborn about it. He took the money that Foursquare meticulously paid him for each day he had hayed, and bought himself a ticket to the Canadian border.

But he went to Canada by the way of Pittsburgh, and in Pittsburgh he existed precariously for a month upon his few remaining dollars. That was something else he hadn't confided to the Harkers—his resolution to see the great Pownfield himself. Pownfield was a formidable old octopus with a dozen tentacles which sucked his sustenance. At college Naphtali had heard that the tentacle which dipped into the Pennsylvania coal shafts was beginning

to touch slaty bottom, and was feeling after new feeding grounds.

It isn't so easy to come within reaching distance of a powerful old octopus and not get thrashed out of the way. For a month Naphtali, with his letters, his telephones, his telegrams, his maps, and his drafted plans, was thrashed out of the way; and it was not until he had spent the major portion of a frosty night upon the fire escape that flanked the Pownfield floor of offices, and had had the janitor's mop shaken over his limpetlike body clamped to the brick wall, that he finally swung an informal and almost frozen leg into the midst of the formal mahogany.

Even so, it was just as well that Naphtali had had his grounding in the art of oratory. He needed it, particularly in the moments which immediately ensued upon the entrance of Pownfield and his horn-tired secretary. They were not accustomed to the sight of a strange young man in wrinkled clothing industriously arranging charts upon the polished tops of all the desks in the room. It may have been Naphtali's debonair removal of a mop strand from his upper arm, and his lucid explanation of the presence of the same, that won attention to his charts. Some of our most prosperous octopuses have had struggles with the deep in their youth, and have thereby acquired a humorous appreciation of fire escapes.

At any rate, Naphtali obtained what he had been determined to obtain as he crouched upon the fire escape, munching the last of an inadequate supply of buns. When he struck out for France by way of Canada, Pownfield had promised to take a look at the Harker hayfields.

Naphtali linked up with the American forces when they finally arrived; and when eleven or twelve other young Harkers were cowering in the trenches, faithful, but frightened, and hating it all, he was sailing the air above them, frightened, too, but loving it all so much that he was ashamed of himself.

When the guns stopped firing, he had to return home, for he had consistently spent his pay each month. Russia tugged at him, and the Orient tugged at him—the Orient, where his Sherarat kinsmen roamed the desert. He sent a last curious glance in their direction and limped on board the steamer.

He had a couple of broken bones that

weren't quite right yet. Besides, he wanted to fill his eyes with his father. Man never loved man better than Naphtali loved his stern parent; and he believed that as Foursquare Harker was stern, so also was he just. Now that his son had virtually established the family fortune, he would undoubtedly see to it that Naphtali got his share—or, at least, enough to satisfy the vast curiosity that urged him to see the world and all that dwell therein.

He found the Harkers, as he had expected, frantically burrowing beneath their hayfields. The men whom Pownfield had sent had had discerning eyes and tools; but, after all, the vein of coal didn't run slantwise under the southwest corner of the farm. It very nearly bisected the Harker land, and it was more in the nature of a deep, rich pocket than a vein.

Naph grinned and acknowledged that he hadn't been quite correct there; and, as the occasion seemed auspicious, he added a remark which he had been waiting for some days for his father to advance—namely, that it wouldn't perceptibly affect the high-water mark of the Harker prosperity if a little of it dribbled his way each month. He would be satisfied with enough to get him from one State to another, say, with first-class stop-over privileges *en route*.

Father Harker went from tan to purple, and asked his son if he had any idea how much money a spur track, necessary for marketing the coal, was going to cost. Foursquare capped his own query with the silencer that of course Naphtali didn't, since he had never even learned what money was.

Speech choked in Naphtali's throat. Shock locked his muscles. For a moment he stood, while his father turned as from an unreasonable child and walked off toward the barn. Then Naphtali sprang after him in full cry, and barred his passage from the feed bins to the stalls.

"Look here! Answer me this! Would Pownfield ever have known about your coal if it hadn't been for me? Do you think it was any fun for me, starving around on the fringe of Pittsburgh for a month? And what did I do it for? To save you from sweating your life out over your pindling wheat! I knew that wheat was growing up out of a solid gold mine; and now what do I get for it? Nothing? Does everybody else get something out of it but the fellow who—"

Father Harker gently prodded Naphtali out of his way upon the tines of his pitchfork, and fed his stock.

II

NAPHTALI went out, turned about in a dizzy circle twice, and then went down to the river. He threw himself full length upon a flat stone in the cove, as he used to do when he was a child, and watched the great river as it rolled on so easily, so inevitably, from State to State. He watched it, but he did not see it. His war fractures hurt him as he lay there for hours, stiff-legged, stiff-armed; but he did not feel them. He was suffering from a new fracture—the major fracture of his life.

But, after all, if the sense of injustice blinded Naphtali to things material, so were things material blinding old Foursquare to the sense of justice. Father Harker was dazed, as well as Naphtali. It had all seemed so easy, the problem of transportation for his coal. The railroad, ten miles distant, would build a spur track over which the coal would be hauled. The company had thus promised in polite terms the year before. Now, approached more definitely as to whether the track would be started the following spring, the railroad officials had reiterated the promise, but had added, also politely, that the sum of eighty thousand dollars must be deposited with them by the first day of October, as a guarantee that the mines would be opened and shipments of coal be forthcoming.

An appended agreement that the deposit was to be returned when one hundred thousand tons of coal had been shipped over the line did not soften the blow for Foursquare, nor did it solve the immediate problem of raising his half of the eighty thousand dollars. A frantic and expensive telegram to Pownfield elicited a laconic and inexpensive reply from the magnetic secretary, to the effect that this attitude of the railroad was to be expected in the routine of business, and that the Pownfield half of the eighty thousand would be forwarded when the entire sum was available.

Well, there it was. The shaft was sunk, and with it were sunk the Harker savings. Foursquare figured that he could raise twenty-five thousand more, perhaps; but forty!

If he couldn't get forty thousand dollars by October 1, he would be a ruined man. His mind leaped and struck and pitched as

ineffectually as a black bass hooked on a spinner; and it was precisely at this time that Naphtali arrived home and struck him for—money! So, you see—

Of course, if Foursquare had laid the whole thing before his son, Naphtali would have understood; but Naphtali, to him, was still the strange, unpractical child who had been born to him out of due time in his late middle life. Of course, this vagary of his about the coal had happened to prove up; but just at this particular time Father Harker was beginning to have moments when he hated the machinery strewn over his peaceful hayfields. If he couldn't get that forty thousand—

Naphtali was the last person in the world with whom he would discuss the matter. He would talk it over with his eldest son, a man stern and silent like himself; but with the younger fry, certainly not! So all that Naphtali saw was that he had been hoisted to one side upon the prongs of a pitchfork, and that he wasn't going to get that trip around the world which he had earned by elevating his family from mediocrity to wealth.

But he gradually began to see other things as he lay by the side of the river. For two mornings he lay there, and in those two mornings he saw what eventually changed his own life and the lives of all the Harkers.

The men on the river steamers called the spot where Naphtali lay Great Oak Knoll, because of the single enormous oak that topped it. The big tree's roots fissured down through the rocks into the whirlpool itself, and it was one of the rivermen's landmarks on their journeyings between Cincinnati and Pittsburgh. There was a sharp bend in the river here, and a surprising tumble of rocks bit back like a sharp tooth into the Harker farm, which flanked the bend.

The rocks took toll of the river, too. Its tawny flood edged into the cove like a shy, curtseying maiden. Then, suddenly stubbing its toes against the rocks, it fled back upon itself in a mad whirl and went scuttling out to its normal course.

Naphtali lay once more beneath the great oak above the whirlpool, a man sore in mind and body; and because his fingers were of the sort that could not be quiet for long, he began to toss down bits of wood and bark, watching them spin about in the water and disappear. Why was it that

nothing thrown in ever came up until it had been sluiced out to the middle of the stream.

He sat up. His malachite orbs raked that powerful flow washing toward him against the bank, tangling against the rocks, and then washing away from him again toward the opposite bank.

He got up suddenly and ran back to the house. He found an empty bottle and drove its cork in tightly. He cast this bottle into the whirlpool and watched it, bent double, his lean hands clenched into his lean knees.

It bobbed for a moment uncertainly, swayed giddily toward the siren eddy, whirled like a mad dervish—and was gone! No, there it was—or was it? Yes, that was it, but far out, far out.

Naphtali sat down finally. He sat there, scarcely moving, for an hour.

III

THE rising of the water-tight bottle was to Naphtali what the falling of the apple was to Newton.

Of course, it made a Roman holiday for his brothers when he told them that he was going to the nearest town to get a job on a river boat. They asked him whether he was going to captain the boat or to hustle freight with the darkies. Even so, they hated to have him go. They were really fond of him; and he gave them much to laugh at. He just couldn't seem to help not having any business sense. Naph said it might take him a week to get a job. He was too sanguine. For three weeks he stuck like a wood weevil, day and night, to the wharf in Riverton. He skinned up the gangplank of every craft that touched there, from towboat to three-deck passenger. He harried captains, pilots, pursers; and then he skinned down the gangplank again, straining his ears for the next landing whistle. He was rapidly becoming a byword and a hissing to the river fraternity when he landed a job; and he landed it by means, I avow, never employed before or since in the history of navigation.

It was a sticky day in July—the sort of day when the steam from the body condenses into glue and pastes the clothing in angry cerement to the skin. A two-deck stern-wheeler fussed in—one of those river busybodies which dodge back and forth between the West Virginia and the Ohio shores, loading freight here, discharging it

there. Above, the captain stood on the burning deck, whence all but him had fled; but he was not a particularly heroic figure. He dripped over the rail in unofficial shirt sleeves. He yelled over the rail in unofficial language. When Naphtali approached him for the fourth time in three weeks, he spat at the young man with an unofficial fly swatter.

Naphtali skittered down the stairs, but he did not leave the boat. He sat down upon a case of canned milk, on the lower deck, and began to watch the gyrations of the gang driver, whom the captain was excoriating from above.

The gang driver, a New Englander with a hard head and a harder tongue, was dancing upon a pile of sacks inside the deck rail, cursing and prodding the black men who were carrying the freight from the wharf to the boat. Toting bulging sacks upon their heads or boxes across their flat shoulders, they came and went in an endless chain, their soggy bare feet producing that curious shuffle which is like no other sound on earth. It was a diverting scene, with the New Englander yelping Cape Cod oaths, and the darkies grinning and taking their own time. One yellow man, a leader in deviltry, wriggled an impious ear each time the driver kicked at him.

The captain whipped out a watch as large and hot as a pancake and snapped:

“Damnation! Due Gallipolis an hour ago! Are you dead on your feet down there, Symes?”

The yellow man wriggled both ears. The darkies laughed. Symes spun off the sacks like a frantic terrier, flea-bitten simultaneously in both hind legs.

“If any son of a gun can skid these black cinders any faster’n what I’m doin’, he can take the darned job!”

Naphtali leaped from the top of his canned dairy and covered the distance to the deck rail in two jumps.

“Is that a go?” he demanded.

“A damn go,” sneered Symes, his red-rimmed eyes traveling Naphtali’s youthful, excited length.

Naphtali sprang upon the heap of sacks. For an instant his eyes looked intently down that rhythmic line of black craniums. If his lips moved, no one saw them. Then, almost gently, he urged:

“Come on, fellows!” He paused. “Come on, now!” he added, and paused again.

Even in the instant when Symes's scornful laugh cut his ear, the black chain jumped and buckled, and the links closed in upon one another. Each man jumped forward as if he had been stabbed in the back. The whites of wide open eyes rolled fearfully, not toward Naphtali, but toward heaven. The *shuffle, shuffle* of the bare feet quickened to *shiff, shaff, shiff, shaff*.

Boxes and bags began to be dumped on the run. Automatically the pencils of the freight clerks and tallymen were forced to double their speed.

"One con-tin-u-ous round of pleas-ure!" intoned Naphtali, and paused. "One con-tin-u-ous round of joy!" Again he paused. "One con-tin-u-ous—"

There was but one person in the world, perhaps, who would have guessed what those pauses meant. He, being a Sherarat, had drifted to the Dakota prairies, where he was proffering a fervent Scotch-Irish version of the Gospels; but any darky in the line could have sworn that directly out of the air above his own personal head had whanged in unearthly accents:

"Shake a leg there, black man! Hell's a poppin'!"

The yellow man could have added that his impious ear had been stung rigid by a weird refrain:

"The devil's a honin' for to bite that ear! Scat, niggah, scat!"

Of course, there was never such another gang driver on the Ohio; and before he had been on the boat a week, Naphtali distinguished himself in another direction. He applied for additional work, without pay. He wanted to heave the lead. He told the surprised captain that he had always wanted to know what was under the water.

Naphtali once said that he was never more thrilled in his life than when his inexpert fingers first paid out the plumb bob over the rail. It was a good year; there had been the requisite two-foot raise, so that the boats, by careful soundings, could get all the way "up the hill"—which is steamboatese for making the shallows all the way to Pittsburgh. So from Cincinnati to Pittsburgh and from Pittsburgh to Cincinnati Naphtali fared that summer, driving darkies and sounding the river.

Of course the whites discovered his skill as a ventriloquist almost at once, and it was not long until the darkies left off whispering that he was in league with the powers of darkness. They were fond of him,

these big black children. He never preached when he came upon them shooting craps. He applauded when they raised their throaty voices in antique chantey or modern ragtime. He tingled their feet into slouchy dances by manipulation of a Jew's harp. On his part he sometimes wondered why he understood the black people better than the white. He did not know that they were Sherarats together, he and this other alien race, as they voyaged on that broad and shining river.

The fact that Naphtali hustled the freight in double quick time sometimes gave him two or three hours at home. While the steamer was tied up, transacting its other business, he rattled the thirty miles to the Harker farm in an antique flivver. Upon the first of these occasions, just after he had completed his third round trip upon the river, he burst in upon his family with the amazing proclamation that he had discovered something that would solve all their financial problems, something that would make their coal more valuable than ever, something that would—

It was the time of the midday meal when Naphtali thus leaped upon the doorsill, beating his leg with his cap. The Harkers were consuming roasting ears; and they did not cease to consume them during this momentous prelude. That was what hurt Naphtali. They did not cease to consume roasting ears, because they could at the same time chortle at him and grind the maize off the cob.

Naphtali faltered. His cap went limp in his fingers. The malachite of his eyes deepened to blue-black as he gazed from one crinkling pair of eyes to the other. Then he tossed his cap upon a chair, sat down to the table, and reached for a cob.

"Say your grace, bub!" thundered his father.

Naphtali said his grace and edged into his cob. His brothers gibed; then, growing curious, they prodded him. Naphtali munched his cob.

Father Harker had bubbled angrily at sight of Naphtali, but for a time he said no word. If he had been an impious man, he would have sworn vigorously; for he was deeply chagrined that the only son upon whom he had squandered a college education was "running the river," as the local patois has it.

As it was, he finally pondered aloud as to why, when the Harkers had always been

land men, this unfilial son should take to the water like an amphibian. Truly, the chastisement of the Almighty was past finding out. Foursquare wished that he had that college money back, now that he was about to lose his farm, his accumulations of the past, and his hopes for the future. He gloomily reached for his rice custard and strained it in bitterness through his afflicted mustache.

Naphtali pushed away his custard untouched, and went out on the porch. Then he turned, twisting his cap, and gazed back through the door at the new lines in his father's face. He made as if to speak, but did not. He went quickly down the steps and back to the river.

IV

THOSE downward lines in his father's face were etched even more deeply when Naphtali made his next visit. The farmer's beard was black and square no longer. It looked rusty and ragged, as if it had been swept too hard by the cold winds of adversity.

The 1st of October, when the forty thousand was due, was less than a month away. Foursquare, who had always regarded mortgages as the particular toys of the children of perdition, had now disgraced his cherished acres by plastering upon them a second of these diabolical instruments. He had also scraped together other small crumbs, and one of these was of especial interest to Naph, for it had to do with his cove.

A certain Captain Doolittle had taken a notion to the tumble of rocks. It had always been an unprofitable place on the farm, and Foursquare had been glad enough to take three hundred and fifty dollars for it. Even so, he was a ruined man, he declared with fevered eyes. He had scraped together approximately thirty thousand dollars, but the other ten were impossible. He wished he had never heard of the coal. He wished he had never heard of the railroad. He wished he could be taken to his home in heaven. Selah!

Naphtali passed over the coal and the home in heaven, and concentrated upon Captain Doolittle and the cove. How much land had Foursquare sold him? As far along the banks as the rocks extended—approximately two hundred yards—and enough land at the head of the cove for the captain to establish his residence.

Naph told him that he must get that cove back, if he had to expend his whole thirty thousand for it. He told his father that he had sold his birthright for a scrimpy mess of pottage. He pulled a folio of papers from his inner pocket, and demonstrated to Foursquare and his sons assembled that, according to soundings taken all the way from Cincinnati to Pittsburgh, the Harker cove was the best landing for coal barges for forty miles along either the West Virginia or the Ohio side of the river. Recover that bit of land, and the transportation problem was solved. The railroad could go hang. Moreover, the cost of transporting the coal by water would be less than one-half the cost of transporting it by rail. Every year the Harkers would be saving thousands upon thousands of dollars in transportation alone.

Most decidedly, therefore, Captain Doolittle must be sought at once, and must be induced to take back that three hundred and fifty dollars—with a bonus of fifty more, perhaps, if he proved obdurate.

Well, of course, Father Harker did not believe this, and his sons only half believed it. There had never been a landing there, so there couldn't be one now. The river banks had always been notoriously shallow for a stretch of at least fifteen miles in that particular district; so they must be shallow now.

Furthermore, Foursquare added, kindly, Naphtali was not to suppose that his father was such a fool as not to have considered the advantage of river transportation. He had even gone to such lengths as to discuss it with the leading farmers of that section, and they had all agreed that there was no possible landing nearer than Riverton, thirty miles distant.

Even when the Harkers went and stood together upon the flat rock, and stared solemnly down upon the whirlpool, they were not argued into believing Naphtali's foolishness. Yes, of course they knew the water was deep where the eddy spun; but it was ridiculous to suppose that that churning of the water had worn a channel halfway across that great mid-continental stream, a channel deep enough and wide enough to admit coal barges and even tow-boats into that Harker cove. The fact that the eddy had been fretting there for untold ages did not betray the Harkers into fantasy. Look, they said, at the shallow banks just around the corner of the cove on either

side! How had Naphtali come by such an idea, anyhow?

Naphtali locked his lips. He would not tell them about the bottle. To be laughed at still shivered his spine.

Finally, however, the eldest brother ruminated that he reckoned it wouldn't cost much to prove that those soundings were wrong.

There were unusually heavy shipments from the salt and bromine wells along the river about that time, and it was the middle of the month before Naphtali again arrived home. The first thing he noted was that his father's beard was square once more, and that he was spading with his old-time vigor. He even chuckled and clapped Naphtali upon the shoulder; but the Harkers were not so jubilant as might have been expected, considering that Naphtali's figures had been proven correct.

The depressive influence was the refractory Captain Doolittle. Approached, as Naphtali had suggested, he steadfastly refused to surrender his new purchase, bonus or no bonus. For years upon years, he declared, he had admired Great Oak Knoll, and he had always intended to build a house there in which to end his days.

So there it was, the Harkers insisting upon taking a new lease of life upon that spot, and the captain insisting upon dying there.

Naphtali inquired who, where, and what was Captain Doolittle. It appeared that he was an old chap who lived down the river at Ironton. The Harkers produced a couple of letters. They were inscribed in the cramped tremble of old age. Evidently he was an ancient who had selected the knoll as the plaything of his second childhood, and who, in the unreasonableness incident to that advanced age, proposed to hold on to it.

Foursquare spaded deeply, and transferred his interest in heavenly homes to the captain. He said, in effect, that he wished the Lord in His infinite mercy would transfer the captain to the Doolittle mansion in the skies, and that promptly. Then there might be a chance of negotiating with whatever heirs there might be.

Naphtali was deciphering a brief postscript appended to the second letter while his father was offering up the foregoing prayer. The postscript was to the effect that the captain might possibly consider an offer of twenty-five thousand dollars.

Naphtali read this aloud, and also the cautious appendage to said postscript:

You ant to take this for sure. I ant sure. But I ant going to take less.

The Harkers smiled ruefully. The ancient mariner either had been born a fool, or had acquired foolishness in his long journey through life.

"Well," ruminated Naphtali, "I tell you, pa—why don't you go down to Ironton and see him in person? Take along five hundred in real money that rattles, and show it to him. All is not gold that glitters, but there's nothing that glitters quite so much!"

Naph was having a new experience—he was sitting squarely in at a family council. That much his soundings had done for him. Always before, upon like occasions, he had edged in and looked over their shoulders, fearful to make a suggestion, lest they should laugh and his backbone should be set a shivering. Now he was conscious of a new and uneasy respect for his judgment.

But he also became conscious, before returning to the boat, that he considerably jeopardized this fledgling reputation by his reply to a question they asked. Stunned by the revelation that he had known all about the landing the first time he had visited them, they angrily demanded to know why he had not then told them, and thus saved them two weeks of fret.

"Because you were eating corn," replied Naphtali.

Of course, any one who made such an answer could not be very smart, after all.

V

FOURSQUARE was not familiar with the myths of the ancient Greeks, else he would have concluded that Captain Doolittle, the old man of the river, was in reality twin brother to Antæus, the old man of the earth. If the strength of the legendary Antæus was renewed, as the Greeks believed, each time he touched upon the earth, the strength of Captain Doolittle was also renewed each time he touched upon his cove. His unwavering conviction now, expressed through his wavering script, was that he would take no less than twenty-five thousand dollars for the cove. Moreover, it was to be paid in a lump sum—no partial payments, no time extensions.

Furthermore, just as Antæus hopped from place to place, so also Captain Doo-

little. He was not at Ironton when Foursquare scuttled down to see him. His name was upon the register of the hotel from which his letters were forwarded. Foursquare saw it not only upon one page, but upon several. The manager said that the old man came and went, that it was impossible to guess when he would come again, and that he was quite a character.

"He's got strength enough to move around, then?" deduced Naphtali.

"He's got the strength of a blasted three-prong billy goat," spat Foursquare, which was the nearest he had ever arrived at sulphurous cussing.

He should have hoarded that choice anathema, for he needed it bitterly three minutes later. A telegram arrived, and Naphtali sighed for it. Captain Doolittle had touched earth at Cincinnati, it appeared, and his strength was as the strength of ten; but it was not, as in the famous poem, because his heart was so exceptionally pure. The telegram read:

Consider previous offer twenty-five thousand annulled noon September 28. Shall then expect additional twenty-five thousand to close deal. No right of way over property.

It was then the afternoon of September 27th.

Foursquare groaned long and deeply, as one in sudden grip of nausea.

"Well," said Naphtali, slowly considering, "even so, when you ante it up, it's a lot better than the rail proposition, anyway. You and Pownfield would have to fork over forty thousand apiece to get that spur in here, and you haven't got your forty; or you can pay twelve thousand five hundred apiece to this bird. It looks to me like the captain had you over a barrel. If you let him roll the barrel, he'll squeeze out of you all you've got. The way I see it, it's either him alive on top of your ground, or the coal dead underneath it!"

Foursquare yanked the longest scraggle of his beard and declared, wild-eyed, that it would be worth all he had to boost the danged old grasshopper out of the cove.

"Don't let the old bird do you out of both land and money, dad," Naphtali volunteered. "You're up against some tough shark, I can see that. Send the money in a cashier's check to the bank at Ironton, and send along good plain instructions not to make delivery until the old cap forks over the deed."

"I reckon you think you'd better go

'long and engineer it yourself!" shouted Father Harker, jamming his hat over purpling ears.

"I think I had," said Naphtali seriously. "When I see the seven men of my family backed up in a corner by some gat-toothed old octogenarian who's wringin' 'em dry—"

"That's enough out of you!" bellowed Foursquare.

Naphtali did go along, and he watched the proceedings carefully. He himself mailed the check to Ironton, and he helped to word the telegram to Cincinnati. Before he turned to go, he mollified his father somewhat by telling Foursquare that he was thus learning business methods.

VI

NAPHTALI made one more round trip upon the river. Then, in spite of an offered raise in salary, he gave up his job. Foursquare was glad. River life was all right if you belonged to a river family, but the Harkers had always been land people, and therefore they must always be land people.

Father Harker was in excellent spirits. Pownfield had made a flying trip—literally. His airplane had landed in the field just behind the henhouse, and the hens had not laid since. The great man had congratulated Foursquare upon his acumen in solving the transportation problem so economically. The outlook for the coal was better than they had hoped. Father Harker added, with large beneficence, that it did not hurt his feelings at all to hear that Naphtali had lost his job. He said he might even make a business man out of him—in time.

Naphtali told them, then, that he had a fancy for taking a trip around the world.

His brothers saw the joke, of course. It was a fancy notion, taking a trip around the world on two hundred dollars—or was it three?

"Well," calculated Naphtali, "I saved two hundred and thirty-six—"

Perhaps, if they had not laughed so hilariously at that point, he might have gone on; but he was struck dumb by a new sensation. It seemed so good to him, he said afterward, to hear them laugh, and for the first time not to be set shivering by it.

So for ten days Naphtali heard his brothers alternately laugh and chide him while he packed and paid farewell visits to every one he had ever known. And as the time drew near for him to go—

Well, behold a kink in that simple, inquiring soul which was Naphtali. Here he was, going about with a secret as big and round as a huge bubble, and with his innate curiosity goading him to explode it and see its effect, when a little sharp feeling deep down within him began to prick at him and to prick at his bubble.

He began to be sorry that the other Harkers were not going on a trip around the world. More definitely, he began to be sorry that they did not want to take a trip around the world. He began to be afraid that after he told them his secret, they would not laugh at him any more; and so, in a way, he would be spoiling himself for them. There would be nobody in the family for them to laugh at.

It is distressing to relate how Naphtali, by being Naphtali, thus ruined the hour which should have been his greatest. The bubble that had been packed to bursting with triumph and self-vindication shrank and collapsed until all that remained of it was a goading at his heart that he must tell them—that he must tell them—

One of his brothers asked him at dinner, the day before he was to go, where his first stop would be—Shanghai or Riverton.

Naphtali pushed back from the table. He lost a little color.

"Ironton," he said slowly, without looking up. "I've got a buddy there. He's manager of the hotel. Well, he's going to invest my money. He's a shark at bonds and that sort of thing."

He was making a mess of his revelation—of that he was miserably conscious. He glanced up and saw Foursquare's fork poised at mention of that hotel. He had to go on.

"Seven and a half per cent." He eased his hand up and down in his pocket. "Two hundred and thirty-six dollars plus—plus twenty-five thousand. You see, there really wasn't any Captain Doolittle."

He stopped, and there was silence. The silence was not golden, however, but more like sounding brass, owing to the succession of gasps which rang hollowly about the table.

"Not any too much for a trip," resumed Naphtali; "but I guess it's enough to get me from State to State with first-class stop-over privileges."

He faced them, then. The Harkers had gone limp, and were staring at him out of ghastly faces.

Naphtali began to grin. He tore a strip of paper, and, with his pencil squeezed in cramped perpendicular, wrote:

Anyway I ant going to take less.

Tardy triumph swept him as they silently passed this trembling script from hand to hand, and gazed down upon it and up at Naphtali with eyes which tugged at their moorings. When they began to yammer questions, Naphtali laughed until he reeled.

Well, the Harkers are a just tribe. When the joke is on them, they can take it; and, as Foursquare afterward weakly observed, it wasn't as if Captain Doolittle had really got it.

"Of course," pranced Naphtali, "twenty-five thousand is poor pay for discovering your coal and then arranging all the business end of it for you. All you've got to do is to dig it out and load it on the barges—mere manual labor. I should think that a little share in the increment wouldn't be any more than right."

They went fish-eyed again at that. It was the eldest brother who first fumbled words together.

"We might as well give it to him," he said heavily. "He'd take it, anyway."

Of course, there were questions, and questions.

Foursquare suddenly spaded out of his chair and heatedly demanded to know why he'd been packed off to Ironton if there wasn't any fool Doolittle anyway, and how Doolittle came to be on the fool register then.

Naphtali had the grace to be a little ashamed about that. He dug the toes of one foot into the heel of the other and grinned sheepishly.

"Well, I've always thought there were advantages in travel; and I used to go up to that hotel when the boat tied up long enough. A chap likes to chin with his buddy. Anyway, dad, I had some curiosity, I guess. I wanted to see if you'd notice there wasn't any room number after Doolittle's name on the register. You didn't, did you?"

Foursquare sat down again and spake no word for a time.

They asked him why Doolittle?

"C'—t was easy!" laughed Naph.

"B' q. I do little and think much."

And why captain?

Naphtali did not laugh, then.

"Because I am the captain of my soul," he said soberly.

Which sounded to the Harkers both religious and irreligious, and hence entirely senseless.

But just as he was leaving, as he stood upon the steps of the train and looked down upon them ranged below him, Naphtali, said the most senseless thing of all. Perhaps he scarcely knew that he was speak-

ing. Perhaps every young Sherarat is more or less bedazzled when he starts out alone upon his first long journey. At any rate, Naphtali gazed down upon his kinsmen out of eyes misted to deeper malachite than ever, and said seriously:

"You see, after all, I did build a palace under the river!"

They went home heavily, pondering upon that.

The Goat Girl of Vitosha

FAR FROM THE TURMOIL OF NEW YORK ARE THE MOUNTAINS
THAT GUARD THE VALLEY OF REPOSE

By Svetozar Tonjoroff

STANLEY MOORE was strolling listlessly through the galleries of the spring exhibition at the Academy. He responded with mechanical salutations to the greetings of his fellow exhibitors, men and women, as he passed them by.

Among the painters admitted to the Academy show, not to know Stanley Moore was to be unknown in the profession. Necks were craned after him as he made his way through the press. Even in his obvious preoccupation, he could not help hearing the suppressed comment of a seascapes painter whose studio he had often visited during the winter:

"Poor fellow! They say he's been hard hit—so hard hit that he can't touch brushes or paint. His present exhibit may be his last one for a long time, I'm afraid."

Moore gritted his teeth on the realization that, through avenues beyond his power to sense, rumors of the tragedy that had overwhelmed him had reached the world of art—that creative world in which, until four months ago, he had been one of the most prolific dwellers. His mental protest ended in a sigh—the sigh of a soldier whom a wound in battle has stricken into inertness.

Suddenly he stopped before a canvas bearing that hung on the line of distinction. Large

He studied it with a seeing eye. "The Goat Girl of Vitosha," it was named.

"Where in thunder is Vitosha?" was his mental comment.

The canvas showed a herd of goats descending a rugged mountainside—a sufficiently ordinary subject, it seemed to him—one with which many an Italian painter might have dealt; but the detail that set the picture apart in a class of its own was the human figure in the foreground. It was the figure of a young girl in a peasant costume, the like of which Stanley Moore had never seen before—a costume of gold trimming and crimson braid on a dark background. It was not a figure that he saw on the canvas, but a personality—a little goddess of youth, of joy, of pagan freedom, who danced with exuberance as she led the flock down the rocky mountainside, with the glint of snow arresting the eye on a peak in the upper background.

He paid the picture the compliment of deciphering the name in its lower left-hand corner—"Anna Mumford." He vaguely recalled that he had seen that name before in Academy exhibitions, especially in the past year or two; but he also recalled that he never had met Anna Mumford.

"Must be one of the youngsters," he commented mentally, stroking his iron-gray mustache.

Then he examined the canvas again with discerning vision. He came to the final conclusion that there were two features in the painting that made it challenge attention—the dancing sprite in the foreground, and in the background the faint blue sunset shadows that had fallen over the mountain gorges—a soft haze that seemed like a caress from the sky. Similar sunset haze, cool and blue, he had seen in Alpine valleys; but never before had he seen it applied with pigments to canvas.

As to the goat girl in the foreground, she was an appealing personality, instinct with life—a veritable oread, a young goddess in pigtails, her front hair flying in the breeze.

He stepped back abstractedly from the brass rail, not noticing that he narrowly missed a neatly shod woman's foot, and ran an analytical eye over every detail of the picture.

"By Heavens, Anna Mumford, whoever she is, must know mountains!" he observed in an undertone, with the nearest approach to enthusiasm that he had displayed since the tragedy of which he showed the shadows on his face—a face darkened by a blue mist like the one in the painting. "She must be a mountaineer—perhaps from Carolina. The name sounds Southern," he added.

He moved back one more step, and his heel touched another foot.

"I beg pardon!" he said hastily, turning to see whose foot it was.

"Readily granted, Mr. Moore," cheerfully responded a woman's voice. "I am Anna Mumford. I saw you standing before my picture, and I thought I heard you talking to yourself; so I had to stop and watch you. A canvas that will attract the attention of Stanley Moore, you must know—"

His hand shot out impulsively. It grasped an ungloved hand that felt cool and dry, but not too dry—a hand that returned his pressure with automatic *camaraderie*.

"Miss Mumford, you've done a fine job," he announced heartily.

The slender girl with chestnut hair brushed fluffy back from a moderately high forehead made no attempt to suppress the blush that mounted to her face. Moore observed that her brown, warm eyes harmonized strikingly with her hair.

"Praise from Sir Hubert—" she murmured, smiling.

He waived her remark aside with a deprecatory sweep of his hand. Her quick eyes noted that it was a slender, tapering hand—an artist's hand—the hand of a woman with the added strength of a man's.

"You are a mountaineer, of course," he asserted positively, with the assurance of one who knew.

"Why do you think so, may I ask?"

"Because"—with a swift glance at the picture—"you know mountains. No painter who has not passed at least a part of his life among mountains—who does not know mountains as he knows the face of his mother—could have painted that"—he pointed at the canvas—"any more than a dabster ignorant of anatomy could have produced the 'Dying Gladiator.'"

"Thank you again, Mr. Moore!" she replied, with a little curtsey. "I must admit I am a mountaineer—but not from Carolina, as I could not help hearing you say."

"From what mountains, then, if one may pry to that extent into the past of a fellow artist?"

She shrugged the small shoulders in the heliotrope gown. The ready smile rose to her eyes; but at that moment something humanly discerning in Moore told him that, despite the sunny expression that seemed to dwell habitually in them, there was an underlying pain in those eyes.

"I'd like to know you better, Miss Mumford," he said simply, perhaps under the urge of his loneliness.

"Won't you come to my studio, in Washington Mews, three doors from Fifth Avenue?" she invited. "Next Thursday, say."

"I shall look forward to it, indeed," he responded.

"It is settled, then—just you and I, unless somebody drops in uninvited."

Another handshake, and they parted.

II

NONE intruded when the appointed Thursday came. Settled comfortably in an armchair, Moore speedily found himself expanding under the influence of his hostess's presence. She was dressed in a plain heliotrope gown—she seemed to affect heliotrope, and it harmonized with her personality, it occurred to him—which set off her young, girlish figure to advantage. She radiated a feminine influence, yet there was about her a touch of the masculine mind

and the masculine point of view that set him at his ease in an atmosphere of congenial comradeship.

He began to talk about himself, as a man is apt to do in company with womanhood of the right sort.

"I wish I were back where I was four months ago," he found himself saying.

"And where were you four months ago?" she inquired lightly, with smiling eyes.

"In the Venusberg," he replied simply. "But my working spells were frequent, and during them I was working hard," he added.

"And you are not working now?" she inquired with concern.

"Haven't touched brush to canvas for four months. I don't seem to be able to. *Oswald*, in 'Ghosts,' complains, as the end approaches, that he cannot work. There are no ghosts in my case, but—"

She gazed at him thoughtfully for a moment, and then asked gently:

"Are you sure there are no ghosts in your case, Mr. Moore?"

"Tell me about yourself." He changed the subject, after he had taken a second cup of tea. "What are you doing now?"

She rose, walked to the other end of the studio, in the north light, and drew aside the cover from a large canvas. It showed the snow-clad rocks of a mountain summit, and a boy standing upon them with an eager, triumphant look, his hair flying in the breeze.

"I call it 'Victory,'" she said.

He stepped over to the canvas and examined it critically.

"Very promising," he pronounced. "Again the mountaineer, I see!"

"Yes—I have been trying to tell the story of the mountain in colors. The sight of a mountain always stirs me deeply, and yet it makes me sad."

As she spoke, he noted a deepening shadow in her eyes.

"Why sad?"

"Because in my early youth a mountain was my prison—a mountain with a snow-clad peak, just like that," she told him, pointing to her canvas.

"Where is that mountain?" he inquired.

"Oh, a good deal farther away than North Carolina," she replied, the shadow vanishing from her eyes. "But you haven't told me about your trip to the Venusberg."

"Oh, that's an old story, and it isn't a pleasant one," he admitted.

"Forgive me! I didn't mean to be inquisitive," she apologized with unmistakable sincerity, blushing quickly.

Her regret touched him. He felt that she wished to avoid hurting him. An impulse of gratitude warmed his heart.

That first tea in her studio was followed by other meetings. At their first dinner together at the Casino, in Central Park, he engaged one of the semidetached curtained rooms. He wished to talk with her, to hear the story of her escape from the mountain which had been her prison.

When the coffee had been brought in, and she was pouring it, he asked her:

"You told me the other day that in your early youth—your young girlhood, I presume—a mountain was your prison. How did you escape from that prison?"

"When nice things happen to little girls, is it not good fairies that bring them about?" she asked, her regular features wreathed in a smile.

"Yes—according to the story books," he assented.

"Well, a good fairy, white-haired and beautiful, set me free. How I loved that fairy!"

"Loved? And you do not love her any more?"

"Oh, yes!" she said softly. "I love her memory. It is my dearest possession."

The depth of feeling thus disclosed moved Moore. He began to feel that here was a woman to whom he could talk about himself.

One day they were dining together in an open-air Italian restaurant—she had astonished him by accepting his invitation only on condition that he would permit her to pay the check—when he said to her, over the dessert:

"It is so pleasant to be playing around with you, Miss Mumford!"

"I'm glad you find it so, Mr. Moore; but my friends always call me Anna," she replied demurely.

Stanley hung his head in thoughtful silence while the Italian waiter brought their coffee.

"I thank you very much, Miss Mumford, but I cannot call you Anna." She gazed at him in surprise. He went on, a dark glint between his eyelashes: "Anna was the name of the woman who nearly

broke me—the woman of the Venusberg whom I am trying to live down."

She was silent, but there were profound sympathy, motherly affection, and loyal friendship in the light touch of her hand upon his. At length she spoke:

"You may tell me as much as you please, or as little as you please."

A few evenings later, when the first flush of summer had come like a caress from the tropics, they were dining in a restaurant across the Hudson River, overlooking the glory of New York at night. Stanley felt so near to her this evening that he wished to lay his case before her—to tell her of the overwhelming catastrophe that had changed the face and the substance of life before him.

He knew men who, under the same blow, would have laughed and gone on, measuring lightly the whim of a woman. He knew other men who would have gritted their teeth for a few days—and nights—and would then have resumed their interrupted lives. He also had known men who, like himself, would have struggled long to restore their balance, and in the end would still be drifting.

After dinner he led her to a little balcony overlooking the river. There, after he had lighted her cigarette and his cigar, he began:

"Can you tell me, out of the richness of your experience—"

"Experience have I none," she interrupted him archly.

"Well, then, the richness of your observation," he conceded.

He could not help thinking it strange that a woman of her age—he assumed her to be twenty-five or twenty-six years old—should have had no experience; but he did not doubt her sincerity.

"Well, then, out of the richness of your observation, can you tell me which motive is the stronger in a woman deciding the question of marriage—love or ambition?"

"My observation," she replied, "convinces me that there are too kinds of women. There is the woman who marries for love, and the woman who says 'I do' to satisfy her ambition. Between the two kinds of women there are almost innumerable gradations."

"Then—"

"But first let me add, sir, that the woman who marries to achieve an ambition has proved recreant to her womanhood, and is

pitiéd by women who have a true realization of the meaning of marriage."

He nodded.

"Under that category of contempt, I suppose, you would put a woman who confesses her love for one man, affirms her distaste for another—and then marries the man she professed to dislike?"

"I certainly should not consider such a woman worth a moment of sorrow to a man," she announced after a pause, blowing a spiral of smoke over the river below.

"Only that in this case the woman happened to be engaged to me," he explained. "Preparations for the wedding were actually being made when she married the other man, who had just received a high appointment in the diplomatic service."

"I remember," she said. "The newspapers were full of the brilliant marriage." She nodded thoughtfully. "Poor man!" she murmured.

"Yes—poor man in one sense," admitted Stanley. "Look at me now!"

"I wasn't thinking of you, for the moment," she explained. "I was pitying the man who married her. Yes, I can see that you are the man who is suffering now. I can understand that it is hard for you to live for months with an atrophied brain."

He rose, lit a fresh cigar, and smoked furiously for several minutes, pacing back and forth along the balcony—like a caged animal, it seemed to her. Then he resumed, taking the cigar from between his teeth:

"That's it, Miss Mumford—atrophied brain and atrophied heart."

He raised his hands, and his fingers swept through his iron-gray hair. He caught a deep breath.

"If I could return to work, all would be well again. Work is the most powerful of all curatives; but I cannot work, I cannot work!"

In his voice her sensitive ear caught something of the quality of a wounded animal's cry.

"Most men have defensive armor," he went on. "Four months ago I thought I was strong, but I have found that I am weak—terribly weak!"

"That's hardly putting it fairly," she protested, looking up at him with eyes that shone moistly in the night. "You are more sensitive than the ordinary strong man, because you are a true artist." He felt her hand touch his arm. "Yes, my

friend, you are too great a worshiper of beauty to be atrophied by a single revelation of the ugly in your own life."

Stanley Moore looked down at the young woman seated beside him with an unaccustomed impulse—the impulse to take her in his arms, to kiss away the tears that he saw on her eyelashes.

It was she who gave an entirely new turn to his thoughts by announcing a prescription as old as the great-great-grandmother of the tribe; but it sounded new coming from her fresh young lips.

"What you need," she began, "is to cut entirely away, for a time, from your old life, your old surroundings, your old ways of thinking and of feeling."

"That sounds familiar, you little old grandmother—very familiar!" he could not resist saying.

"But it is nevertheless true," she insisted earnestly; "and I know the very spot where you could achieve the complete separation that you need."

"What is that spot?" he asked her with interest.

"The Valley of Repose," she replied promptly.

"The Valley of Repose?" he repeated. "From the Venusberg to the Valley of Repose, eh?"

He could see that her small person shrank from the comparison.

"Forgive me," he murmured contritely. "But do tell me where is this Valley of Repose?"

"I won't tell you now. You must trust me," she replied.

"Trust you? Isn't that a somewhat unusual thing to ask?"

"I admit it is very unusual; but in a few days I'm going to the Valley of Repose myself, for the first time since I was there—let me see—seventeen years ago. Mrs. Schuyler's going with me."

"The miniature painter, you mean?"

"Yes, my bosom friend; and I'm sure she'd be glad to have you join the party. I shall be provided with a chaperon, you see," she added, smiling.

Shutting his eyes to the sparkling lights of New York, across the brimming river, Stanley Moore went over the situation swiftly in his mind. Anna Mumford was a sane, sweet girl, with the touch of healing in her soul. Besides, she was a painter who would be heard from increasingly in the future. He cast his memory over his own

past, over the shock that had shattered him; and then he looked ahead at his hope for the recovery of his power to work and to live. On the other hand stretched a long vista of inanimate existence, such as he had led for more than four months past.

She took the words of decision out of his mouth.

"It is settled, then?"

"It looks very attractive, I'll admit—and thank you from my heart!"

"Very well!" she resumed briskly. "We sail about the middle of July. Since it is not a question of money with you—or with me, fortunately—please get three tickets for Havre, and I will reimburse you for my two—"

"Oh, you needn't do that," Moore interrupted.

"I must insist," she said decisively. "Questions of propriety aside, I was lucky enough to get five thousand dollars for 'The Goat Girl of Vitosha,' and I've already had a good offer for my unfinished 'Victory.' Havre will be the first milestone on our way. Then we go on—"

"To the Vosges, perhaps, where I was on detached duty during the war?"

"Oh, were you?" she asked with eager interest. "We are buddies, then! I was at the base hospital behind Nancy. But it is not to the Vosges that we are going. Please remember that I stipulated," she went on, a mandatory note in her gentle voice, "that you must trust me. Your ultimate destination will remain a complete surprise to you until you reach it."

She changed the subject abruptly, throwing her arm around the back of her seat with a sigh.

"Oh, I've longed for years and years to see the Valley of Repose once more! That isn't its real name, but that's what I always call it." And then, in a businesslike way, widely at variance with her sentimental mood, she went on: "Don't forget the three passports. I'll give you the list of countries on a piece of paper before we leave the restaurant."

III

"HERE is the Valley of Repose!" announced Anna Mumford, sweeping the sunset mountain scene with her hand—a deep gorge, its scraggy slopes overgrown with trees and shrubbery, and a mountain torrent running through it over a rocky bed, with tinkling, murmurous current.

"And there's the blue sunset haze that you put into your picture of 'The Goat Girl of Vitosha,'" responded Moore, panting to recover his breath, for the climb from the little village of Boyana, overlooking the red-roofed city of Sofia, had set his pulses thumping.

Higher, toward the mouth of the cleft between the hills, they walked along a whispering mountain brook, clear as crystal, and sank wearily on a jutting rock over the torrent. The song of the stream affected Moore like a sedative. The moist, cool breath of the gorge cooled him. The caressing hand of nature soothed his jangled nerves.

From the shrubbery on the steep mountainside came the tinkle of bells, like sheep's bells.

"There are the goats!" she explained radiantly.

"Oh, this is the valley where 'The Goat Girl of Vitosha' was born?" he questioned.

"This is her birthplace," she laughed happily. "There's old Vitosha up there," she added, pointing up the height. Then a new note vibrated in her bubbling voice as she swept her hand up the gorge. "And there's the goat girl herself!"

In the far distance, up the height, he saw the figure of a girl. She was dancing, like some woodland nymph, her hair flying, her skirts fluttering. Behind her followed the flock, like worshipers following a Greek mountain goddess.

Slowly the goats were coming down through the sparse brushwood. Bringing up the rear of the flock was a goatherd, his cloak thrown over one shoulder, his pipe to his lips, playing it as Pan might have played.

"Beautiful!" exclaimed Moore, with an odd sense of the banality of his words to describe this revival of a phase of life when the world was young.

Expecting a reply from Anna Mumford, he saw that she was watching the picture with her hands clenched in her lap.

The dancer and the flock vanished behind a rocky ridge, and in a few minutes reappeared over its brow, coming straight toward them, until Moore could almost distinguish the gilt embroidery on the girl's slender waist and along the edge of her skirt.

"By Jove!" he said, under his breath. "That's the very costume that your goat girl wears in the painting!"

Goats were playfully butting one another with their curved horns or leaping lightly and sure-footedly from rock to rock. The song of the goatherd's pipe came clearly, liquidly to the ears of the two listeners. It was an old-world melody — a melody that a Thracian goatherd of antiquity might have played on a summer's evening on the same declivity.

A sob at his side recalled Moore to the immediate present. He saw his companion's slender body shaking like a reed with the gust that followed.

"What is the matter, goat girl?" he asked her very gently, patting her on the shoulder.

He checked an instinctive desire to fold her in his arms as he might fold a sorrowing child.

She mastered her emotion with an effort, and turned to him a face from which she was dabbing the tears with her handkerchief.

"In that dancing girl I saw a picture of myself at her age," she said. "Many a time have I led my flock down this same mountainside. Looking at her, I seemed to be gazing at myself across the bridge of the years."

He stared at her blankly, deeply stirred by her involuntary display of emotion from hidden depths.

"You?" he exclaimed incredulously. "What do you mean?"

"Just that," she replied with a steadied voice. "I was born in this village, and I tended the goats with my father, just as that little girl is doing."

"But—but how do you happen to be Anna Mumford? That's not a Bulgarian name," he gasped.

"Anna is my Bulgarian name. Mumford was the name of my good fairy, the American woman who befriended and adopted me when I was about the age of that child. One of the conditions of my adoption was that I should never tell my father's name to anybody during her lifetime. I was legally called Anna Mumford. My dear foster mother has been dead for several years, but this is the first time that I have told my secret, and you are the only person I've told it to."

"You've paid me a great compliment, goat girl!"

"Oh, I love it, I love it!" she exclaimed joyously. "Goat girl is my name—"

"To me," Stanley added softly.

But a decisive question still remained on his lips. It framed itself into words as the little goatherd at the head of the flock was vanishing into the main street of the village, followed by her charges.

"But how do you explain your painting, and all the rest of you—your technique, your atmosphere, your flawless English, down to the last detail of accent?" he pressed her, greatly puzzled.

"My technique, my atmosphere, my flawless English, as you have been kind enough to call it, are the gifts my foster mother gave me, just as she gave me her modest fortune when she died—I wish she were living! And yet I can claim that my traditions as a painter came from a much more remote background. My great-grandfather was a painter. His *chef-d'œuvre*, a fresco of St. Matthew the Evangelist, is beside the altar of that little church down there."

She pointed to the village.

"Oh, you mean the fresco we were looking at yesterday—the one that's so different from the others there? Why, it makes St. Matthew look like a man, instead of a geometrical design in the outline of a man, the way most of those Byzantine frescoes look!"

She nodded understandingly, proud of her ancestor's originality, of his courage to revolt against tradition.

"Yes," she said. "After he had finished the first fresco, the church trustees wouldn't let him paint any more such impious pictures, as they termed it."

"Well, you can point to at least one

good man on your family tree," he congratulated her.

"So you see," she went on, "my training really began about a century before my foster mother sent me to an art school in America, and then to a famous studio in Rome. People don't always realize the strength of inherited tendencies. And yet my father died a goatherd—poor father!" she added with a sigh.

He saw the tears in her eyes, and the sight brought him very near to her. It was at that moment that he made his decision—the great decision toward the brink of which he had been gradually drawn since that evening on the Palisades, overlooking the night glitter of New York.

"Come!" he said. "The twilight is gathering fast upon Vitosha. You see how cool, how blue, the evening haze is. It will take us three-quarters of an hour to motor back to the hotel in Sofia, and poor Mrs. Schuyler must be starving for her dinner!"

"We must bring her up here to-morrow," suggested Anna, rising lightly to her feet and smoothing out her skirts.

On their way home it must have been the scent of the new-mown hay in the roadside meadow that sent the throb of a new life through his veins. In the tree-darkened lane he put his arm around her and said in her ear:

"Goat girl, I cannot live without you! I have recovered completely. My fingers itch for the brushes. When shall the wedding be?"

She nestled against his arm comfortably, contentedly.

ON REACHING ITALY

I SHOULD be happy—it is May;
Once more the sky of Italy,
Lit by low-hanging, lustrous stars
Like golden flowers, is over me;

Once more I see the brooding pines
Etched black against the hills of gray;
The mountain, like a misted cloud,
Is merged in shadows of the bay.

The air is heavy with the scent
Of blossoming vine and locust tree;
I should be happy—but to-night
My heart is somewhere out at sea!

Lena Whittaker Blakeney

The Cross of Truchas

THE STORY OF A STRANGE CONFLICT OF HIDDEN POWERS

By W. P. Lawson

XXIV

OF the many witnesses to Ramon's sudden appearance in the midst of his enemies, none, it is safe to say, was more dumfounded than the young man known as Ricardo Quintana; nor was his wonder lessened by the sight of Juan, whom he had left, only a few hours before, on the cliff high above the valley. How in the world, Quintana asked himself, had the Indian succeeded in reaching his master? What had happened to the guard, Vincente Baca? Above all, where had they left Claire Innes?

Concern for her whereabouts, it appeared, was not his alone; for Montoya had whispered to Emilio de Gama, who in turn addressed the two new arrivals.

"You were guarded, I am told—you two, and a third," he said. "How, then, did you elude the warden? Where is the *Americana*?"

Juan answered promptly:

"Vincente would have fired on my master—he is dead, slain by my hand! As for the *señorita*, I do not know. She came not hither with us, as you see."

De Gama's brows drew together menac-ingly. He called to the three men selected by Montoya to bring in the captives.

"Find me this woman!" he ordered. "She cannot have strayed far!" His gaze returned to the Indian who had so casually confessed the killing of the guard. "Bind this man Juan! Lay him beside the other—the blasphemer!"

Juan drew back a step, his teeth showing in a snarl, his long knife gleaming in his hand. Those who had pressed forward recoiled more quickly still. There were few who desired a hand-to-hand conflict with the giant Indian.

Montoya raised the gun he had taken from Quintana; but Ramon, gazing about swiftly, spoke to his servant in a quiet tone. Juan's face puckered, but he thrust his knife beneath his clothes and held forth his arms.

"Bind me, then," he muttered, "since my master wills it!"

A moment later he was stretched beside Quintana, tied hand and foot. Above them Father Felipe stood motionless, his keen eyes on Emilio de Gama.

The Mexican's regard was fixed on Ramon, who stood leaning heavily on the Penitente beside him. The wounded youth's face was drawn with pain. He seemed to retain consciousness only by an effort of the will. Emilio de Gama spoke again:

"By a mischance, Ramon de Vargas was hurt when captured. Lest he should sink under the early phases of his ordeal, his be the first flesh to feel the lash! What say you, brothers—a stroke from each present, and thereafter the honor of a crucifixion, as the condemned desires?"

A shout of acclamation sounded. Willing hands seized Ramon and stripped the shirt from his back. The blood-soaked bandage about his breast was tightened. They led him across the little stream to one of the crosses erected opposite, and tied his wrists firmly to the crossbar, his face inward, his bare back exposed. The brethren formed in a long line to pass the cross, and set up their wailing chant.

The acolyte proffered the heavy whip he held to Emilio de Gama, who took it absently and strode forward toward the cross, followed by Montoya; but suddenly the leader stopped.

"It is not meet," he said, "that hostile eyes should observe the approaching cere-

mony. It is permitted that the priest remain; but place the two whose fate remains to be decided within the *morada* yonder. When the gringo woman is found, let her be bound and laid beside them, to await our pleasure."

He moved on again, swinging the leather-thonged whip, to where the motionless form on the cross awaited the torture to be meted out. What the Mexican would have thought had he known that from the doorway of the *morada* the *Americana* whom his men sought was at that minute peering out, watching his slow progress with fearful eyes, it is impossible to say.

Claire was shaking as with a chill. She was dazed by the unexpected impact of events. Since the killing of Vincente, it seemed to her that she had been living in a nightmare, followed by unseen pursuers, gazing on scenes that bore the lurid hallmark of the pit. She was free from the cabin where she had been held, but not from the dark valley. How long she would be able to remain hidden from the Penitente searchers she could not tell; nor, at the moment, did she greatly care. The cumulative experiences she had undergone weighed on her mind like lead. She was stunned and numb under the burden of remembered horror.

The worst had been when she had seen Ramon's open eyes fixed upon her in the cabin, and had heard his amazing declaration of apostasy. Vaguely she recalled his rising and walking to the door of the hut, where Vincente, his gun aimed and ready, stood grimly waiting for him. That was when she had rushed forward and had struggled to prevent the madman from setting foot across the threshold. Weak from his wound, he had staggered and fallen backward as she closed with him. She had risen and turned to plead with Vincente—and had found the guard lying on his face, with the handle of a knife upright between his shoulders.

She recalled the shock, and her start of fear at the sound of a voice close at hand. She had looked up to see Juan, cut and bruised, his clothes torn and stained by earth, stumbling toward her from the direction of the cliff.

"My master—is he badly hurt?" were the Indian's first words.

They turned together to Ramon, who was stretched senseless on the floor of the cabin. Juan lifted him with ease and bore

him to the pile of saddle blankets in the corner. Claire repeated Montoya's words—that the ball had glanced on a rib, and that the wound was not necessarily dangerous. Not if Ramon received proper care, she added to herself; but what if he were tortured by the brethren?

A quick thought came. With Juan's aid, might she not restrain Ramon if, on recovering, he should persist in his resolve to surrender? The Indian had succeeded in entering the valley, by some method as yet unexplained. Was there no chance that they—all three—might yet escape the fate reserved for them?

With this hope dominant, she told Juan all that had taken place, including Ramon's intention to yield himself to the Penitentes, and his wish to expiate what he regarded as his sin. To her surprise, the Indian did not see eye to eye with her as to the folly of his master's resolve. She had forgotten that Juan himself was a Penitente.

"Don Ramon has judged well," he declared with gloomy conviction. "Should Montoya force my master to undergo the torture against his will, Juan would fight for him to the death; but since he would suffer penance of his own volition, I will not cross him, *señorita*."

"But he is wounded! To suffer the ordeal now will kill him!"

Juan's face was stubborn.

"Even so, *señorita*, is the loss of life a matter to deplore when salvation weighs against it?"

The girl gave in, despair at her heart. She watched by Ramon's side till he should recover consciousness, hoping that this time his eyes might open on a saner world than his sick brain had known before. Her thoughts had left her own unhappy case, to center on the young man and the dire fact of his aberration. If she had ever felt real love for him, it was now, when passion had been burned away, leaving a deep pity in its place—an affection that was more like the feeling of a mother for her child than that of a woman for her lover.

Hours passed. The moon rose and stole across the sky. Claire sat on, immovable. Shouts and the confused milling of many men about the fire below betokened that preparations for the forthcoming ceremony were under way. Momentarily the girl looked for a summons from her captors.

Now she regretted having told Juan of Ramon's decision. They were unguarded.

Nothing prevented their issuing from the place of their confinement and hiding as best they could from the eyes of the Penitentes, who would thus be cheated of their prey, at least for a time; but the Indian, when she broached the project, flatly refused to budge. He would wait till his master came to, and would learn his will from his lips.

Claire could have left them and fled alone; but this she was loath to do. She dreaded the dark valley shut in by its inaccessible cliff ramparts. She could not bring herself to forsake Ramon, for all that her presence did him no least service. Moreover, she had not entirely relinquished hope of his regaining reason with his next awakening. She told herself that he might be able to suggest some better scheme of action than she herself had hit upon.

At length he opened his eyes and stared up vacantly at the two bending over him.

"I have come, master," muttered the Indian, "to do thy will!"

Ramon rose weakly, aided by his servant. Claire's heart sank as she saw in his eyes the same fanatic light that they had had when they closed.

"I would seek atonement, Juan!" he gasped, utterly ignoring the girl. "Aid me to reach the council fire, where the brethren gather!"

They set off with slow steps, Claire following aimlessly. She had done what she could to prevent the result she dreaded, and it had been of no avail. Despair had come into her heart. It seemed to her that this appalling march marked the end of everything that she held dear. Why, then, should she herself strive to escape the fate that loomed for her?

Her half-formed purpose was to surrender with the others; but when they drew near the fire, with the yelling fiends about it, her courage failed her. To postpone the awful moment of submission to their will seemed to her the one stark necessity of her being. She stopped involuntarily as the others moved slowly forward.

She saw Ramon and Juan emerge into the circle of firelight and halt in the wondering stare of the crowd. She saw the tall figure of Emilio de Gama, which she did not recognize. By his side was Montoya. In the background stood Father Felipe, and near him, bound and lying on the ground, was Ricardo Quintana, who had promised to aid her if he could.

Evidently Quintana's endeavors, like Claire's own, had ended in ignominious failure; yet the mere sight of him, alive, somehow served to stimulate her waning courage. He could not see her, she was sure, but his expression was anything but hopeless. He would fight on, his angry eyes and set jaw seemed to say, despite the desperate nature of his present situation. Could she be less courageous?

The feeling of natural affinity, of some obscure tie between them, which she had felt at times in the past, came over her now with added force by reason of their isolation among enemies. He could not help her—that was plain; but could she not help him? At the worst she still had liberty of movement. Was there not some coign of vantage from which she could watch what happened without being in turn spied upon?

She glanced about quickly. The dark chapel on the knoll to her left caught her eye. Its walls threw shadows. Looking from the zone of firelight, it must lie in impenetrable darkness. It was, too, the last place a search party would guess that she had chosen as a refuge.

Cautiously she drew back and circled wide to the left, coming up to the chapel from the rear. She gained the doorway without misadventure, and stealthily slipped inside, crouching there with a deep breath of relief.

At the moment Emilio de Gama was issuing some command. What it was Claire surmised from the fact that men lifted the prone forms of Quintana and Juan—both of them were bound now—and began carrying them—straight toward her hiding place.

Her heart rose in her throat. She could not risk leaving the chapel. With no clear plan in mind, she rose and fled to the rear of the room, where a long closet appeared—the cache where the paraphernalia of the order were stored. Quickly she stepped within and closed the door to a crack.

Breathless, she watched the Penitentes lay their double burden on the floor and then hasten back whence they had come, loath to miss aught of the ceremony underway. Claire breathed again, and hope stirred faintly within her. It seemed a miracle of good fortune that she should be opportunely here to release Quintana, and to assure him that at least one person—though a woman—was working with him to frustrate their joint foes.

Softly and with infinite caution she opened the door of the closet and moved toward the dim forms of the captives. She was within a yard of them when Quintana groaned and turned over, as he struggled with his bonds. His face lay in a shaft of moonlight that pierced a narrow window to the left.

Claire never knew why she suddenly stopped, caught in a strange medley of emotions. It did not seem to be the Mexican fire guard who lay there, but another. The conviction which she had felt faintly before, that this was some one whom she had known in days long past, came upon her with overwhelming force. Memory struggled to break through the shell of years into her numbed consciousness. Who was Ricardo Quintana?

The moonlight on the young man's face gave it an unaccustomed paleness. The disfiguring scar was scarcely visible. The twisted smile that she had thought must be in part its product was wholly missing. The sleepy eyes were wide, with a new expression in their depths. The whole face had a different aspect, as if a disguise had been abruptly thrown aside.

She bent over and looked closer. The straight black hair had been pushed up at one side, revealing a telltale streak of white along the brow and the gleam of yellow hair above. It came to the girl, in a flash, that the man indeed had been disguised, and that she had penetrated his disguise. She knew him!

She dropped to her knees beside the prisoner and whispered, with a sharp and exultant excitement:

"Richard! Richard Warren! Is it you, or am I dreaming?"

XXV

For a long moment Claire gazed spellbound on the youth before her. As she gazed, with more and more certainty she knew him for the man who had deserted her when she was an innocent and ardent girl captured by his pretense of devotion. He had left her, as she recalled in a spasm of remembered misery, vowing eternal fealty; and for five long years he had vouchsafed to her no sign of his existence.

Had their meeting taken place at some other time, in other circumstances, the sudden knowledge of his identity would doubtless have roused her to indignant anger, to wrath grounded in contempt. Pride would

have allowed no different reaction to emerge; but now, with death imminent for both, her pride was in abeyance.

She realized that she had no enmity toward him. In the guise of Ricardo Quintana, he had rewon the trust that he had lost as Richard Warren. The impression that she had gained of him in his latest rôle lingered, despite the thought of earlier recreancy.

With a strange clarity of vision she gazed on the frank features that the moonlight showed. There seemed no place there for duplicity, no trace of weakness or of cowardice. Could she, she wondered, have been misled as to the fact of his abandonment? Had there been some hideous mistake? She had been deceived in so much by her father, why not in this also? At the thought her face lighted and hope whispered pleasurable to her heart.

Her brief passion for Ramon de Vargas had suddenly left her. She knew it now for what it was—a fever of the senses only, called into being by the insubordinate desires of youth.

As she knelt staring at this other man, probing the recesses of her heart, she also knew that despite every obstacle that reason could advance, she still set Richard Warren on a pinnacle alone. Her old love, her first and last love, revivified and singing in her veins, was an experience, she realized, of deep and lasting significance. Even with his earlier offense unexplained, she felt that to die with Dick—if die they must—would be a sweeter fate than to live on without him.

When the girl called his name and dropped beside him, so that her face came into the moonlight, Richard gazed up at her in silence, his eyes wide, as if he looked upon an apparition. A strained expression grew gradually in his face.

"You know me!" he murmured at last. "Yet your eyes are kind! Is it pity that moves you to regret my present case?"

She leaned closer. Her voice was scarcely audible.

"Not pity, Dick!"

A light leaped into his face at the soft tones, at the meaning that charged her eyes.

"Can it be," he whispered tensely, "that they lied to me, long ago, when they returned my letters and told me that you had repented of your short infatuation and wished to see me no more?"

Hope turned to joy in the girl's breast—to a glory of unconquerable happiness. It seemed to her that all her life she had been walking blindfold, through a nightmare of unreal grief, toward this glad moment of awakening.

Richard had been true, her heart sang! He had been faithful!

There was no time now for explanations between them, she knew; yet she said with swift vehemence:

"There has been a terrible misunderstanding. I see it now, perhaps too late. They did lie to you—and to me. I thought you had deserted me; and yet, beneath everything, I think I have always held you first. Now, at least, I love you, Dick—and I shall love you to the end!"

He drew a deep breath. His face was as the face of one who looks, after vicissitudes, clear-eyed upon his heart's desire.

"The irony of fate," he murmured with a faint smile, "that we should clear our path of all hindrances at the moment when it promises to end forever!"

His words ruthlessly brought Claire back to the present. With a sharp qualm, she realized the insufficient tenure of their lives.

"Is there no hope, then?" she asked, half to herself.

Warren's face grew grim and his jaw set resolutely.

"Hope enough, and the strength of new desire. We are alive. You are here, miraculously, to release me! There must be a way—"

"There is a way," came a voice from the shadows by the doorway. "There is a way, which I shall reveal to you, if you two will aid me in a plan I have in mind!"

Claire turned quickly toward the sound. Richard, too, glanced anxiously into the obscurity. Like a shadow, Dolores Montoya glided from darkness and stood above them.

"I would save Ramon," she went on swiftly; "for since he broke from the spell of the *señorita*—who, it appears, has found prompt consolation for his defection—I have hopes that our love will move along propitious ways; but first he must be rescued from the hands of the dark brethren."

The girl's voice was low and even-toned, but her face, Claire noted, was drawn and marked by bitterness, and her eyes gleamed as with a fever. She waved an abhorrent hand toward the door, through which was visible the long line of the Penitentes wind-

ing past the cross where Ramon hung. As each one of the file reached the spot, he caught the whip from the hand of his predecessor and brought the lash down vindictively upon the red-striped back of the unconscious victim. A mournful chant issued from the lips of the fanatics as the rite progressed.

Claire shuddered, and could not repress an exclamation of horror. Dolores's eyes rested briefly on the *Americana* and then turned questioningly to Warren.

"What will you do?" asked the youth eagerly.

"This, first!" replied Montoya's daughter, as she bent and cut the cords that bound him.

He rose with some difficulty, stamping softly, flexing the muscles of his arms. Then, before Claire fathomed his purpose, he caught her to him and kissed her.

"Our time may be short," he murmured. "If we do not escape, I shall have the memory of this to take beyond the grave!"

"Have done!" snapped Dolores. "Place and time enough for love-making when our work is finished!"

She had turned to Juan, and was preparing to free him also, when the Indian broke his silence.

"Loose me not, *señorita*, if to be freed is to aid you against my master's welfare!"

The girl straightened and stared, frowning, with surprise in her face.

"What mean you, fool?"

Claire would have explained Juan's attitude as she had learned it, but the Indian was first.

"Don Ramon has chosen to atone. It is for his soul's sake that he suffers. The gates of heaven open wide before him. Why, then, should we seek to hinder the atonement?"

Dolores straightened slowly and replaced the knife in its sheath.

"Another mind unhinged!" she commented shortly. "I had counted on this one; but no matter—we will do without him!"

Without more ado she moved quickly to the rear of the room, motioning to Claire and her companion to follow. Fumbling against the wall by the fireplace, she pressed suddenly on a hidden spring. The slab that formed the hearth rose slowly, till it rested against the chimney behind. A black hole, with descending steps, yawned where the slab had been.

"Here," said the girl, "is a way out of the valley. Few know of its existence. I myself learned the secret through a chance indiscretion of Don Tomaso, my father."

A flash of exultation came into Richard Warren's face.

"We are saved!" he cried, starting forward eagerly.

"And Ramon?" queried Dolores.

Warren stopped and gazed at her with strange eyes, as if debating a matter in his mind. At his look she smiled faintly and pressed the unseen mechanism in the wall. The slab slid into place once more, a bar between them and the outer world. At the same time the Mexican girl drew a revolver from beneath her cloak, with an effect of casualness.

"It is to enlist your aid in rescuing Ramon, *señor*, that I have shown you the only possible way to safety. Have patience, therefore, I pray you, till the first venture be completed!"

Warren's heart sank. To snatch Ramon de Vargas from the midst of the fanatics outside seemed an undertaking bordering on the fantastic; yet to attempt it was the only way of impelling the determined girl who faced him to unlock the stone door of the underground passage.

"You plan a sortie?" he asked incredulously. "Two women and a man to fight a hundred crazed enthusiasts? It would be madness!"

"I had hoped for Juan's aid," she returned imperturbably, "but he has failed me. There remain you and myself, *señor*. The Señorita Innes must remain here, for she would but hinder us."

"And you dream of success?"

She nodded with complete conviction.

"I shall save Ramon, *señor*—make no doubt of that. Listen! None of the brethren is armed, and the advantage of surprise is ours. Thus have I planned—we will go to the right when we emerge, keeping in the shadows. We will join the line of brethren at its extremity—being the last two, therefore, to wield the whip. I came hither with Emilio de Gama, cloaked as you see. So far none of the brethren has recognized me. You shall don a cape from the closet yonder, where the store of the Penitentes lies. In the uncertain light we shall not be detected before we reach the cross where Ramon hangs."

"Yes, but what then? Is it not better to rest here, and to let Ramon risk the re-

mainder of the ordeal? If fighting comes, here we have some chance of making a stand. They may even bring him here, once the whipping is over."

"Once the whipping is over, *señor*, they will nail Ramon to the cross. It is what my father has determined. That, with his wounds and his suffering, would be the end, were we not here to succor him. When we have reached the cross, you will quickly cut the ropes that bind him and lift him to your shoulders. It is the part I had reserved for Juan; but you are strong. There will be few between us and the *morada*. It is a short run only, and the light, as I have said, is not of the best. If any should attempt to intervene, I have my pistol. Once we regain the shelter of these walls, once the door is shut and barred against pursuers, we are safe, *señor*!"

Warren stared at her, his face a study. He admired her courage. For himself, he would take the desperate chance that the girl's scheme offered; but there was Claire! He turned to her, but she was speaking as he faced her:

"Go, Dick! May God's hand guide you!"

"Give me the knife, *señorita*!" he said to Dolores. "The plan, as you say, has its virtues!"

The flames of the fire had fallen, and it was a mass of glowing embers. The line of chanting brethren was silhouetted against the darker cliffs behind them. The moon sailed the sky overhead, smaller and whiter than before. The cross on the tall peak to northward maintained its age-long vigil, serene, inviolate in its white majesty.

Warren followed Dolores to the doorway, and watched her as she glanced this way and that ere she stepped from the shelter of the *morada*. Why did she hesitate and peer anxiously toward the north? What was that dark wedge which loomed at the sky's margin, advancing with the speed of thought across the mild face of the heavens? Light flamed and flickered over it; the rumble of far thunder sounded, grimly menacing. A sighing in the trees that clothed the mountains rose to a dismal wailing, then to a louder, fiercer note that dulled the swinging cadence of the Penitente chant.

A puff of cold wind struck the watchers. The lightning flared out vividly. The dry season was broken. The first storm from the north was driving down again.

Dolores drew back abruptly and faced her allies with illumined features.

"The saints are with us! A moment only, and the blanket of the storm itself will hide us. Ah, the good God is merciful that He thus aids our plan!"

XXVI

THERE was a roaring in the trees that drowned out all other sounds save the recurrent thunder. The wind was a gale that swept the valley floor like a great broom. Dust and sticks filled the air. The black cloud from the north raced across the sky, ever larger and more portentous.

The watchers in the doorway of the *morada* saw the long line of Penitentes falter. The hand of the man who at the moment held the whip was checked in mid-air. The heads of all were turned in the direction of the approaching storm. Well did the brethren know the violence of nature when the dry season broke.

Montoya was speaking quickly to Emilio de Gama, his mouth close to the envoy's ear. He waved a hand toward the *morada*, and was evidently suggesting that they should seek shelter there till the worst of the storm passed. Dolores whispered warningly to her companions, but the Mexican Penitente refused the shelter indicated. He was seen to shake his head and gesture peremptorily to the file across the stream, as if to urge them to complete the rite of flagellation.

The black cloud had engulfed half the sky. It moved on rapidly toward the moon, whose pale rays still touched the valley softly. The cloud gulped the moon at a mouthful, and a weird darkness fell. The dying fire alone lit the scene, its red gleam shining on the two Penitente chiefs, on the kneeling form of Father Felipe, on the cross where the hapless victim hung, pinioned by the arms.

Dolores peered forth eagerly.

"Now, *señor!*" she said, and slipped from the doorway.

Warren, with a last glance and a wave of the hand to Claire, followed her. Instantly they were swallowed by the darkness of the secret passage.

The girl they had left stood without moving, straining her eyes in the gloom. In a momentary hush between thunderclaps she was aware of a sound close by—the sound of a man struggling fiercely, of Juan fighting against the ropes that bound him. She

would have investigated further, but just then a flash of lightning came, and she made out an addition to the line of the Penitentes. Thus far, she surmised, the daring strategy of the rescuers had been successful.

Those of the brethren who had already dealt the single blow permitted were gathered in a semicircle below the cross, carrying the burden of the chant, and waiting with what patience they possessed for the end of the long ordeal—an ordeal for them, now, as well as for their victim. At the moment when Claire's eyes fell on this group she saw them bow their heads and wrap their cloaks about themselves more closely. At the same time a blank opaqueness dropped like a curtain between her and the world, blotting out all things. The rain had come!

It was less rain, in truth, than a watery torrent, an emptying of the vast cisterns of the sky. The floor of the valley was flooded. The stream of the Gallinas foamed and rose quickly, overflowing its banks. The rattle of the thunder seemed to dwindle in the hiss and spatter of the downpour. It was a veritable cloudburst, thought the girl fearfully.

Soon the opaque mist thinned somewhat as the rain slackened and fell more steadily. Thunder was directly overhead, crash upon crash. The lightning was constant—fierce, jointed flames that flickered and stabbed the sodden earth vindictively. The gods of the black void rode abroad. The trampling of their war steeds shook the world, the flash of their bright spears was blinding.

The red embers of the fire had sputtered and died out at the first onset of the rain, but the lightning lent a fitful vividness to the new scene. Claire saw the priest, still praying on his knees, unmoved amid the turmoil. She saw Montoya and his companion upright like statues on the knoll beside the blackened fire. There were the huddled brethren beyond the stream, below the cross.

She drew a quick breath of excitement—the last two of the Penitente line had reached the cross. The crisis of their undertaking was at hand.

The first and smaller of the two—Dolores, as Claire suspected—cast down the blood-stained whip as it was yielded to her, and turned abruptly on the waiting brethren, her ready gun threatening them. Her companion was slashing at the cords that

bound Ramon's wrists to the crossbar. The victim's limp form fell from the cross, and was quickly flung across Warren's broad shoulders. Leaning against the hurricane, the rescuers swung around and plunged into the waters of the swollen stream that barred their path to safety.

There was blackness for a moment, but in the next lightning flash Dolores and Warren, the latter with his dripping burden still on his back, showed clear and sharp on the hither bank of the stream.

Claire sighed with relief. She had feared for them in the rushing torrent that they had been forced to breast. Her relief merged into dismay as she saw Emilio de Gama grasp Montoya's arm and point to the rescuers with his free hand. Montoya nodded, and jerked from beneath his serape the automatic that he had salvaged from Quintana—which fact the young man had overlooked, to his present cost.

Dolores, noting her father's move, stepped in front of her companion, as if to shield Ramon. Her gun was leveled even as Don Tomaso brought his weapon into line; but ere they fired the fluttering illumination of the lightning failed them.

Montoya and the envoy were between the rescuers and the *morada*. Claire prayed earnestly that the darkness might hold till her friends had passed the point of greatest danger; but as she voiced the wish unconsciously, she heard the muttered words:

"You would deliver the body of my master, *señorita*—I go to save his soul!"

She whirled as the lightning glared. A dark bulk shot by her, and she saw Juan, with shreds of rope clinging to his wrists and ankles, leaping toward the oncoming rescue party.

She screamed a warning, but the thunder drowned her cry. It also drowned the bellowing voice of Juan. Montoya, who was near enough to Warren and Dolores to see from their faces that a new element had come into the conflict, cast a swift glance behind him, and started sharply. Ignorant of the Indian's real intentions, he could not be blamed for judging that the menacing figure was hostile to himself, rather than a potential ally. With a snarl of rage, he raised his gun and fired point-blank at the man's breast.

Juan dropped in his tracks and lay still, a martyr to the superstition which had driven him to his death.

At the same instant Warren, seeing his

chance, laid Ramon's body on the ground at his feet and sprang forward across the space that separated him from Montoya. Ere the Penitente could turn to face him, he struck at Don Tomaso with his whole strength. The blow caught Montoya behind the ear, and he fell as if smitten by a thunderbolt.

Warren snatched the gun from the other's hand, and turned upon Emilio de Gama.

"To the stream!" he said tensely. "Do not delay, on your life!"

De Gama hesitated, but briefly. There was that in his foe's eyes that lent wings to his feet. Without a word he turned and scuttled ignominiously down the slope, away from the *morada*. Warren, at his heels, paused beside Dolores, and once more took up the lax body of Ramon.

"The way is open, *señorita*!" he panted. "A moment more, and we are safe!"

But the brethren across the stream, stupefied at first by the daring maneuver of the rescuers, had rallied. They came surging across the stream and up the slope. They met the Mexican envoy, and carried him with them in their rush to overhaul the two who would cheat them of their prey.

Dolores was walking slowly, as if exhausted. Warren, with the dead weight of Ramon to support, labored beside her, unable to lend her the aid she plainly needed.

The speeding Penitentes were overtaking the fugitives, and would come up with them, Claire saw, before they reached the shelter of the *morada*. Impulsively she ran forward, put an arm about Dolores, and helped the swaying girl toward the doorway. She did not see Warren's anxious frown, or the glance he cast behind him, judging the prospects of escape.

Claire supported her fainting charge till they had gained the refuge they sought. Dolores's face was deathly pale, her eyes heavy and dull. She dragged her feet arduously, as if walking in a dream; and Claire's eyes widened apprehensively as she perceived a stain of blood on the left shoulder of Montoya's daughter. The girl was wounded. Don Tomaso had fired in the darkness, with better aim than he had thought!

Claire would have laid Dolores on the floor of the *morada*, but she objected.

"To the passage!" she muttered, her features strained with the resolution that kept her from collapse.

They gained the fireplace. Dolores's hand groped along the wall, and with a last effort she pressed the hidden spring. The slab that formed the hearth rose slowly, even as the girl collapsed in a heap at her companion's feet.

Claire stared with beating heart at the gulf opening before her. It was the path to safety, but where was Richard, and where was Ramon? She glanced hastily back, through the entrance door of the chapel. By the flickering lightning she saw a sight that congealed the warm blood in her veins.

Five yards from the entrance the fastest of the Penitentes had come up with the young agent, and were surrounding him. He had laid down the body of Ramon and stood astride it, prepared to sell his life as dearly as he could, now that the end had come.

As the girl gazed with horror in her eyes, the ranks of the enemy were reënforced by dark forms which sprang forward in swift succession. Knives gleamed in swarthy hands—the order's ruling against weapons at the council had been honored in the breach, it seemed. Claire groaned in bitterness of spirit. It was indeed cruel that at the very last, so close to escape, they should thus be frustrated.

The murderous fanatics were closing in on her lover—hers for so brief a time. On the outskirts Emilio de Gama, his eyes ablaze with hate, urged on the brethren with hand and voice. A moment, thought the girl, and it would be over. The dream that she had waited so long to realize threatened to dissolve before her eyes in a red mist of blood.

She could not bear it—she would not! She sobbed wildly, with anger as much as with anguish, and, turning, ran swiftly to where Dolores had fallen prone. She took the gun from the unconscious girl's hand, retraced her steps to the door, and sallied forth to die beside the man she loved.

Her glance was on Emilio de Gama. He must be dealt with first, she had decided. She raised the pistol, sighted along the barrel—and then stopped uncertainly, for the savage face she saw above the sights had frozen suddenly to a blank look of wonder. The envoy was staring northward, pointing with a shaking arm.

Beyond him Claire was aware of Father Felipe, who hitherto had not left his knees, starting upright and stretching his long

arms toward the heavens, as if in gratitude at the miraculous answer to a prayer. The Penitentes had whirled and stood as if spell-bound.

Above the rumbling thunder rose an awesome cry:

"The cross! The cross!"

Claire's eyes swung northward with the rest—northward, where stood the giant peak with the great cross carven on its face. Its summit was wreathed in swirling clouds, but by the fire of the heavenly artillery there could be seen, for a breath, the strange mark set like a symbol of protection over the souls within its wide-flung shadow. For a breath only—and then, in the dazed girl's sight, the whole face of the mountain seemed to fall away, to crumble and disappear. The cross was gone. It had vanished from the sight of men forever!

In the momentary hush of consternation, the voice of the priest shrilled out:

"Beware, Penitentes! Beware the hand of God! Thus do the idols of the wicked fall and shatter into dust!"

Like a period to Father Felipe's sentence, a terrifying crash sounded. Untold thousands of tons of dislodged rock fell from the precipitous slope above the cliff and rolled in a tumbling avalanche down the mountainside, straight for the doomed valley.

The roar of the approaching slide shocked the ear—a cosmic turmoil beside which the loud noise of the thunder was as nothing. A vast cloud of dust arose, a wind came whistling, the solid earth shook beneath the watchers' feet. Stones flew through the air, huge boulders bounded down like hail. The slide neared—death neared, speeding faster and faster.

In the confusion Claire felt a sudden iron grasp on her arm. She turned, to see Warren at her side, with the body of Ramon once more across his shoulders. He was shouting, but she could not hear his words. She understood, however, that he was warning her—urging her to run while there was yet time. Together, they made what speed they could across the space between them and the *morada*, no one so much as noticing that they had gone.

They were at the mouth of the dark passage leading to safety. Warren motioned to Claire to descend first, but she shook her head, and bent to pull Dolores toward the yawning hearth. The young man hesitated, and then stepped quickly down the

stone steps to the point where the tunnel led off horizontally. Laying his burden on the level floor, he sprang back up the steps, caught the limp form of Dolores in his arms, and took her down in turn.

Claire stooped to enter the passage after him. As her foot found the top step, there came a rending, smashing shock. The world seemed to burst apart into a million fiery particles. The girl's senses left her abruptly.

XXVII

CLAIRE opened her eyes on a calm, star-sprinkled sky, with the low moon at its edge. The tempest had swept the earth, leaving a trail of devastation in its wake, to disappear as quickly and mysteriously as it had arrived. The air, wiped clean by the storm's passing, was cool, with a bracing tang. There was no sound save the murmur of a stream close at hand.

Recovering her senses slowly, the girl raised herself to look about her; but a sudden pain in her head and a quick nausea assailed her. She sank back dizzily, closing her eyes.

She remembered the crash of the great landslide and her lapse into unconsciousness; but that had been in the *morada*, by the entrance to the hidden passage. Where was she now, she wondered? Where was Richard Warren? Where were the others?

Once more—cautiously, this time—she raised her head from the rolled blanket on which it rested. She found that she was lying on the ground in a cañon bed, some yards from the stream whose voice she had been hearing. Across the stream black cliffs loomed; behind her the long rock walls were white in the moonlight.

She did not recognize the spot, but she was outside the terrible valley of the Penitentes—that was sure. She breathed a prayer of thanksgiving for that mercy.

She lifted her head a little higher, resting on one arm. Her roving glance settled on two figures not twenty feet distant. The first, which she knew instantly for the figure of Ramon de Vargas, was stretched on the ground by the stream's edge, his face downward, his back bound with white cloths. He made no sound or motion, save the occasional involuntary twitching of his shoulder muscles.

Beside him sat Dolores, leaning forward solicitously, a hand gently stroking the youth's hair. Her face was brooding, and

there was that in her eyes which checked the hail that trembled on Claire's lips. It seemed somehow a sacrilege to speak, to shorten by a breath that mood of troubled ecstasy.

At times, in days past, Claire Innes had thought Montoya's daughter cold, so quiet, so self-contained had been the girl's outer aspect. Now Claire saw her error, for a deeply passionate spirit lay open to her sight. Dolores's soul was in the look she spent upon Ramon—and her soul's other name was love.

As Claire gazed, Ramon stirred suddenly, turned over on one side, and glanced up at the girl bending over him. How, wounded as he was, he had survived the ordeal of the whip, the watcher could not understand; but his look seemed rational, and, though he frowned with pain when he moved, the fever had left him. Dolores, too, had been wounded, Claire recalled; she bore her left arm in a sling.

The youth's lips moved presently.

"I have made atonement to God, dear one," he said slowly, "for my sin against His holy commandments; yet it is in my mind that I have injured you still more deeply. Can you forgive me, and set me a penance to fulfill?"

Dolores bent and kissed him with gentle ardor.

"Your love is all I ask, Ramon. If I have that, I am more than content. The past is past; the future, if you will it so, is ours!"

The young man grasped her hand tightly.

"I offer you a lifetime of atonement, *cara mia!*"

The reunited lovers were silent for a space. Then once more Ramon's voice sounded questioningly:

"You have not yet told me how we come to be here together—free to tell our love to each other. Was it that the brethren deemed the penance of the whip adequate, and discharged me shaven of my guilt?"

Dolores's words came soothingly:

"Do not seek to know all now, Ramon. It is a tale for winter nights. Your penance was adequate—have no fear there. Almost you paid your life for what was at the worst a venial sin. You must know this much, that without the aid of Ricardo Quintana—"

"Do I remain that man's debtor?" interrupted Ramon.

She nodded.

"Even so, Ramon. Without his good will we should not now be here together. We owe him much—we two, and a third—the Señorita Innes."

"Ah, the Señorita Innes!"

His face clouded over. Claire's nervous laugh came in an awkward pause.

"Do not fear that I will plague you longer, Ramon. It is a great joy to me that you see now where your true happiness lies. I, too, have unearthed a hidden treasure, long lost, but now regained. Let us cry quits, and let me wish you good luck!"

The youth stared at her, frowning. Not in a moment, his expression said, could he accept his late love in the rôle of friend.

He would have spoken, but at this moment a脚步 sounded on the rocky trail above them, and their eyes shifted in the direction of the sound. Claire's heart leaped as she saw Warren walking down the narrow gorge.

He came straight toward her. There was an anxious look on his tired face; but as his eyes met hers, a fire sprang up in them that warmed her to the core.

"You're better—that's good! I hated to leave you, even for a moment, but I had to be sure there was no further danger from those within the valley."

Claire felt a foolish trembling in her limbs. The beating of her heart seemed to stifle her.

"I—I don't know yet what happened," she stammered. "I was stepping down into the passage when a terrible crash came, and I knew nothing more."

Warren smiled cheerfully, and then spoke in a low voice, so that the others could not hear. It was evident that he and Dolores had conspired to keep from Ramon the details of his rescue.

"The slide hit us—or, rather, its forward fringe," Richard told Claire. "It smashed the *morada* flat. You were struck on the head—a glancing blow, luckily—and fell into the tunnel, where I caught you. I carried you and the others along the passage, one at a time. It ended in that cave." He waved a hand toward a dark opening in the cliff behind them. "I brought you out in the air, and left you here while I reconnoitered."

"And you found?"

Warren shook his head somberly.

"The valley was a death trap for the Penitentes. Some may have escaped

through the pass that Pedro guarded, and fled down the cañon, but not many. We must wait for dawn to see." He turned with brisk decision to the others. "Ramon—and you, too, Dolores—should have your hurts attended to. There are rangers coming at any moment now. You must leave for Truchas when they arrive—if you can ride?"

The girl nodded.

"We can ride, *señor*," said Ramon, with a trace of stiffness; "but first I have to thank you for what I am told you have done for me and for the Señorita Dolores, who will be my wife."

Warren waved a deprecatory hand.

"Whatever I did, it was to save my own skin as much as yours. The Señorita Innes, too, was involved. If you must thank some one, thank Dolores. It is her doing that any of us are here alive to tell the tale of our adventures."

His face altered suddenly, and he bent forward in an attitude of listening. From down the cañon came the sound of many hoofs, the chink of saddle harness.

"The rangers!" he exclaimed in a voice of relief.

Around the bend they came, a long line of bronzed men loping in single file, sitting their weary mounts as if grown to their seats. In the lead rode Moore, who waved a gauntleted arm and spoke to the posse behind him. The riders slowed to a trot, drew up by the waiting group, and sprang from their horses.

Quickly Warren explained the situation.

"Leave me five men," he ended. "You and the rest take the wounded to town, and see that they have every care till I get there."

Moore seemed disappointed that the promised fight was denied him; yet he was glad that those he had ridden to succor were safe. He gave the needed orders to his men, and helped Dolores and Ramon into their saddles.

He approached Claire.

"I've picked a gentle horse for you, Miss Innes—" he began; but the girl stopped him.

She had risen, and stood with flushed face and sparkling eyes, a spirited picture of remonstrance.

"What? Must I leave when the danger is all past?"

"You must be exhausted, Claire," said Warren. "Much better for you to go with

the others and get to bed as soon as you can."

She turned on him indignantly.

"Not till you go! I stay with you!"

He smiled, with a side glance at the ranger.

"A touch of fever, doubtless," he remarked. "We must not cross her!"

At dawn the valley presented a strange and terrible sight. Choked level with the cliff walls at its upper end, the lower reaches, where the last council of the Penitentes had been held, were thickly strewn with stones thrown forward by the slide. The *morada* was obliterated, the altar and the site of the fire before it were completely buried, and the row of wooden crosses beyond the stream had been swept away.

On the knoll before the chapel the litter was comparatively thin. Here, thrusting up from the jumble of broken rock and earth, there could be descried an occasional stiff arm or leg, or the dark patch of a cloak—gruesome clews to the crushed bones and flesh beneath.

To this spot Warren directed his men, with orders to discover whether life remained in any of the buried clasmens. The youth's face was grave and set. In death his enemies had lost their former menace. They were merely pitiful relics—tokens of the inevitable mortality of human creatures.

He glanced at Claire solicitously.

"Awful, isn't it?" He paused, staring at the spectacle of ruin. "I came here to fight the Penitentes, and I should have failed, but for the falling of the Cross of Truchas. Odd, when one thinks of it, that the symbol to which these zealots pinned their faith should in the end have overwhelmed the band!"

Claire's eyes moved northward to the peak. Where the cross had stood there was a huge cavity in the mountainside, ragged and deep, as if gouged out by some titanic shovel.

"Must one believe in miracles?" she murmured.

Her companion smiled grimly.

"It was a coincidence, rather, I imagine; though you will get no one in Truchas to believe that. It is the end of the order logically. This will be construed as a judgment on its members."

He ceased, glancing toward his men, who were dragging a limp form from beneath a pile of rock.

"Wait for me here, please!" he said abruptly. "No need for you to watch the details of our work."

A moment later he was gazing down upon the distorted visage of what had once been Don Tomaso Montoya. Soon the dead body of Emilio de Gama was unearthed. They found Juan's crushed corpse, too, with a bullet through the heart. Body after body rewarded their search, but in none was any spark of life apparent.

Claire watched them moodily from the boulder on which she had seated herself. Warren had told her that he would not remain here long—that he would merely convince himself that none of the unfortunates remained alive, and would then ride in to town with her. She felt herself regretting that she had not left with the others. The ghastly nature of the task under way appalled her. Her head throbbed dully, her limbs ached from exhaustion.

The need for water smote her presently. She rose and picked her way among the rocks, heading for the stream, which strove protestingly to clear its channel of the débris that clogged it. Halfway there she stopped suddenly, her heart throbbing painfully. She had heard a low moan—or had dreamed that she heard it—from the piled stones on her left.

For a moment panic threatened to overcome her, and she opened dry lips to summon help. Then, at a recurrence of the moaning, her fears left her abruptly. A survivor was here—a living soul in that wide area of ruin! With feverish haste she made her way to the spot whence the sound came.

Wedged cruelly between two great masses of rock was the figure of a man. His head and shoulders were free, though battered and covered with wounds and dried blood. His eyes were closed, his face deathly pale. Claire cried out involuntarily as she saw his face and recognized him for the missing priest, Father Felipe.

XXVIII

CLAIRE leaned forward quickly and called the priest's name. He did not respond to her voice, and she saw that he was unconscious. Only a low moaning came at intervals from bloodless lips.

The girl glanced around her wildly. Warren, who had heard her cry, was running toward her, making what speed he could over the uneven ground. She dashed

to the near-by stream, returning with a strip from her skirt soaked in water.

She found the agent waiting for her, gazing down compassionately at the senseless man.

"Can we do nothing?" she asked breathlessly. "Your men—can they not extricate him?"

Warren shook his head.

"Twice our combined strength would fail to move those stones. There is nothing we can do, Claire—nothing at all!"

She was laving the priest's face, squeezing water from her cloth upon his forehead. As she gazed, hoping against hope for a further sign of life, the moaning ceased. His lips tightened, his nostrils widened at a deep indrawn breath, and his eyes slowly opened.

"Oh, father!" sobbed Claire. "If we could only help you!"

Comprehension came into his eyes, and a gentle smile shadowed his lips.

"The body is beyond help, *señorita*; yet, for your comfort, know that I feel nothing of pain." He paused, fighting for breath. "If you would ease my mind," he added, "tell me what others beside yourselves have escaped the wrath of God's destroying angel."

Quickly Warren told of the saving of Dolores and Ramon—told, also, of the dead bodies they had found.

"We four and yourself, father, are all who live, I fear," he ended.

The old priest stared for a moment as if unseeingly. Then his dim eyes sought Claire's.

"I have long loved Ramon like a son, *señorita*—the son whom my priestly office has otherwise denied me. Forgive me, therefore, when I say to you, do not tempt him more! His heart, for all its straying, belongs to Dolores—who loves him, as I think. Bring them together! You will be well rewarded."

"Dolores and Ramon have already made their peace, father," replied the girl softly. "And I—I already have my reward. I have regained the man whom I have long loved—the man who stands beside me!"

Joy lit the seamed face of the dying *padre*. His eyes turned gratefully toward the sky. His voice rang out more strongly as he cried:

"Glory to God, who has blessed me at the last! My prayers are answered—I go to Him, the merciful!"

His face grew gray, his eyes dimmed. Claire's sight failed in a mist of tears.

"It is the end," said her companion softly.

As they rode homeward down the cañon of the Gallinas, it was plain that Claire was likely to pay dearly for her obstinate resolve to keep up to the last. She leaned forward, swaying in the saddle, her hand tightly clutching the horn. The color had left her cheeks. Her eyes were sunken, with dark circles beneath them.

When they reached the ridge on which stood Hilltop Station—the late camp of one Ricardo Quintana—it was obvious that she could go no farther without rest.

"We'll stop here," her companion said with curt decision. "There's no lookout here, for last night's heavy rain kills any danger of fire for the time being; but there ought to be food in the cabin. I'll get a fire going, and fix up a snack."

A little later Claire sat down to a meal of coffee and hot biscuits, beans and bacon. She ate ravenously. Never, she thought, had food tasted half so good. Life revived in her, and her spirits rose miraculously. Lingering traces of the past day and night of terror vanished as morning mist dissolves in the sunshine.

Afterward she sat leaning against a giant pine, staring with contented eyes at the wide forest before her. Her companion was seated opposite, cross-legged, and smoking with every evidence of pleasure. His back was to the view, his eyes on the girl's face.

"After the storm, calm!" he said presently—perhaps merely to capture her wandering attention.

Her eyes swung to his. She smiled. Then her smile faded, and she said gravely:

"There is something I must tell you, Dick; but, first, there is much that puzzles me about your being here. I want to know how and why you came to Truchas. I want to know everything!"

He frowned, pressing the red end of his cigarette against his boot till it grew black.

"Can't that wait, Claire? Can't we just enjoy—this, for the moment?"

He waved a hand at the peaceful scene around them. She shook her head.

"I'd rather get things cleared up first," she said.

He drew a deep breath and plunged, since he must, into his recital. It was a

glamorous yarn he spun for her—a tale of danger and constant effort, of passion and occasional stark tragedy. He spared details, touching only the salient features of the story; yet he began at the beginning and went through to the end.

It began at his mother's death, when—having by this time despaired of Claire's hand—he had gone to Mexico as the representative of a mining company. He told how his duties, routine at first, led him later to take sides in a brewing revolution; how in this work he had crossed the trail of the Penitentes, and had saved the life of their chief, whose confidence and ultimate support he won.

"But it was not all plain sailing," he went on. "There was a faction against me—Emilio de Gama and his followers. The head was old, and Señor de Gama aspired to succeed him. I held my own while the chief lived; but when he died, suddenly, it was another story. My enemies got control, and plotted to put me out of the way. I got wind of the plan and escaped, taking with me most of the secrets of the order and a valuable token—a white stone cross which had been worn by the head, and by which they set great store. This I took partly in revenge on my would-be murderers, and partly because I thought it might be useful at some future time."

"And was it?" his auditor asked, as he paused.

"You shall judge in the sequel," he replied, smiling.

He told of his years of hiding from the emissaries of the Penitentes—a story in itself; how during this period he worked, disguised, as an agent for the government, tracing gun runners and suspected revolutionists who lived on blackmail wrung from reluctant American concessionaries. Then came the cruel murder of his friend Holt in Truchas, when a use for the white stone occurred to him. He had come to the little mountain town for the purpose of revenge—to secure proof of the crime, to capture the guilty, and to stamp out, if he could, the local organization of the order that he so bitterly hated.

His plan was to pose, when the opportune moment arrived, as the high preceptor himself, trusting that the local brethren might not have had news of the new head, or might at least be ignorant of his personality. He had been able to form an alliance, of a sort, with Father Felipe, who,

he learned, was not in sympathy with the Penitente band. He had hoped for aid from Ramon de Vargas, too, but circumstances had prevented this.

"My scheme, you see," he admitted, "was in some respects vague, depending on what turned up for the next move. De Gama's coming spoiled everything, and I should have failed in the end, as you know, had not the landslide happened in the nick of time."

"Yet you did not fail," Claire said musingly. "Perhaps, as Father Felipe thought, his prayers were more effective than all your plans and efforts."

"Perhaps," he agreed. "Who knows?"

She was staring out at the tapestry of waving trees, her face thoughtful, her eyes meditative. Suddenly she turned to her companion and searched his face keenly. It was evident that she was nervously herself for some new passage which to her seemed critical. She spoke abruptly:

"Tell me, Dick—during all this time, through all these terrible events, you have loved me?"

The young man's face flushed.

"No credit to me," he answered with grim candor. "I couldn't help it. Most of the time, I—I wanted to hate you, Claire. I tried to, but I couldn't; and—yes, I have always loved you!"

Her eyes widened. Her lips were trembling, though she smiled.

"Even when you came here and saw me—flirting with Ramon?"

"Flirting?"

"No—not flirting. You are right. I really loved him, in a way. Call it infatuation, if you will—that comes nearest, I think, to the truth; yet while it lasted it was strong. Did you know that I offered to leave Truchas with Ramon, and that he refused the offer when he learned that I was married?"

It was out—that which she had vowed to tell Richard ere their love was sealed by mutual trust. She stared at him with a still face, with apprehensive eyes.

His expression did not alter. He gazed back at her with an uncanny calm. No sign of his mind's workings was visible.

"Can you forgive me, Dick?" she faltered. "Can you still love me?"

He nodded slowly.

"It is forgiven, Claire, and I still love you. What will you say, though, when I tell you that there was no bar, as you

thought, between you and Ramon? Had you known what I knew all the time, you might have gone with him safely, and without sin. You might have married him."

Blank wonder marked her features.

"What? What do you say? I might have married him?"

Warren was frowning anxiously, and small beads of sweat stood out on his forehead. It was his turn for explanation.

"There was no thought of myself in what I did, believe me. It was for you that I kept silence when I might have spoken. I thought it was best for you."

"But what—how could I have married, when I already have a husband, when I am joined by the church to one whom I shall hate till death do us part?"

Richard's eyes were steady, though he spoke through stiff lips:

"Hate him no longer, Claire—for he no longer lives to trouble you. You are free!"

She stared speechlessly, seeming unable to realize what he said.

"It is true," he went on quietly. "I saw the news of Vinton Walsh's sudden death

a week after you came. It was in a paper of Moore's, which I destroyed, dreading lest the news should reach you. Did I do wrong, Claire?"

She rose unsteadily and moved toward him. She looked deep into his eyes, solemnly grateful that her heart had found an anchorage no storm could loosen; that the white ship of her long dreamed-of happiness had sailed into its haven smoothly at the last.

The answer that she gave her lover was not couched in words, yet it appeared to satisfy him.

A little later she strove to escape the coil of his restraining arms.

"I've just remembered!" she cried with a smile—her old radiant smile. "I must go to Isabel. I must tell her something which will gladden her. I had lost faith, Dick. I have regained it!"

"Faith?" he asked vaguely.

She nodded—without smiling, now.

"Faith in human love and human loyalty; for without faith in these, faith in a God of mercy is unthinkable!"

THE END

THE QUEEN PERSEPHONE

So many springs, so many Aprils,
So many daughters of delight,
Have greened and burgeoned, bloomed and beckoned,
And then gone dancing out of sight!

I met the Queen Persephone,
One morn of May, in a green glade;
She turned her fairy eyes on me
And said: "Lo, I, a shade,
Was once a mortal maid;
But even as I,
All maids to shadows turn.
Their gold and marble are a sigh,
Their lips that burn
A memory of roses long ago,
Their bosoms vanished snow;
Their feet are fled
Where only shadows tread
Poppies and asphodels,
And only silence dwells."
So spake the Queen Persephone,
On a May morn, to me.

Then, as she went, my love was at my side;
Her lips were roses and her marble breast
Was cool as water lilies, and I sighed
As her young flame against my heart was pressed;
But soon, when on my lips her lips were laid,
I thought no more that she was but a shade!

Richard Le Gallienne

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